

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

1-1-2009

Even in the Face of History: The Experiences of Gifted African-American Students

Rivian Segal Bass
University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bass, Rivian Segal, "Even in the Face of History: The Experiences of Gifted African-American Students" (2009). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 759.
<https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/759>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

EVEN IN THE FACE OF HISTORY:
THE EXPERIENCES OF GIFTED AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Rivian S. Bass

March 2009

Advisor: Dr. Nicholas Cutforth

©Copyright by Rivian Segal Bass 2009

All Rights Reserved

Author: Rivian S. Bass

Title: Even in the Face of History: The Experiences of Gifted African-American Students

Advisor: Dr. Nicholas Cutforth

Degree Date: June 2009

Abstract

While schools are experiencing unparalleled racial, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, gifted programs do not reflect these changing demographics. In fact, African-American students are less than half as likely to be in gifted classes and programs than are their European-American counterparts. In addition, little is known about the impact of gifted programs on students.

This qualitative study incorporated oral history interviews to examine the experiences of four gifted African-American students who attended full time programs or schools designed for gifted students. In telling their stories through narratives, participants constructed past events with a focus on the personal meanings ascribed to their experiences. Thus, the impact of gifted programming is revealed through both benefits and costs, and implications for educational stakeholders surfaced.

Blending oral history with educational criticism and connoisseurship provided a framework with which to describe, interpret, and evaluate the educational events and settings of these gifted students. Recurring themes - adversity, resilience, and acceptance - emerged from the analysis of the data and defined the educational experiences of these gifted African-American students. Insights from each participant were combined with essential features that emerged from the interpretation and evaluation of their stories. Implications focused on issues of advocacy, awareness and acknowledgement, and support. Resulting recommendations hold significance for those who work with and

advocate for gifted African-American students and/or for those who make policies that guide gifted programming.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my students from André Agassi College Preparatory Academy
who unknowingly launched a life-altering journey.

I will be forever grateful.

*I hope it will be said
we taught them
to stand tall & proud,
even in the face of history
& the future was made
new & whole for us all,
one child
at a time.*

Brian Andreas

Reprinted with artist's permission 9/27/08

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Investigation Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Significance of the Study.....	2
Purpose and Research Questions.....	4
Methodology Overview.....	4
Dissertation Organization.....	6
Definitions.....	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	10
Challenges Faced by Gifted African-American Students.....	12
Social Policy Issues.....	12
Curriculum and Instruction Issues.....	26
Social and Emotional Issues.....	41
Key Resources and Supports for Gifted African-American Students.....	52
Parental Support.....	53
Professional Support.....	54
Community Support.....	57
Impact of Gifted Programming on African-American Students.....	58
Chapter Summary.....	61
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	62
Qualitative Research.....	62
Research Method.....	62
Research Design.....	63
Data Collection.....	65
Data Analysis and Presentation.....	68
Researcher's Role.....	71
Subjectivity.....	72
Connoisseurship.....	76
Chapter Summary.....	77
Chapter Four: Participant Profiles.....	79
Introduction.....	79
Shandra.....	80
Morgan.....	93
Chauncey.....	108
Malik.....	118
Chapter Summary.....	129

Chapter Five: Findings.....	130
Introduction.....	130
Question One.....	130
Social Policy Issues.....	130
Curriculum and Instruction Issue.....	134
Social and Emotional Issues.....	139
Racial Identity.....	145
Summary.....	151
Question Two.....	151
Family Support.....	152
Teacher and School Support.....	154
Community Support.....	157
Peer Support.....	158
Question Three.....	161
Evaluation Through Thematics.....	167
Introduction.....	167
Adversity.....	167
Resilience.....	173
Acceptance.....	177
Summary.....	179
Question Four.....	179
Advocacy.....	180
Awareness and Acknowledgement.....	183
Support.....	189
Future Research.....	194
A Final Note.....	197
References.....	201
Appendices.....	213
Appendix A: Parental/Guardian Informed Consent.....	214
Appendix B: Youth Assent Form.....	218
Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form.....	222
Appendix D: Interview Guide.....	226
Appendix E: Emerging Codes.....	228

Chapter One: Investigation Introduction

Introduction

“Abundant data suggest that gifted programs are the most segregated educational programs in the United States” (Ford, 1995, p. 52). Ironically, this statement comes at a time when our schools are experiencing rapid changes in the demographics of their students. It is predicted that by 2020, culturally diverse students will comprise almost half of the students in our public schools (Ford, 1998). Although schools are experiencing unparalleled racial, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, gifted programs do not reflect these changing demographics (Castellano & Diaz, 2002; Ford, 1998, 2004).

The Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education of the National Research Council (2002) found that placement in gifted programs varies dramatically by ethnic group. African-American students are less than half as likely to be in gifted classes and programs than are their European-American counterparts. Thus, while 7.47% of all European-American students are placed in gifted programs, only 3.04% of African-American students are afforded the same opportunity (National Research Council). Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) note that African-Americans represent 17.2% of the school population, but only 8.4% of the gifted program population. Minority underrepresentation in gifted programming is “very extensive and longstanding” (Miller, 2000, p. 1). Further, the limited presence of minorities among top students is found using all

traditional measures of academic achievement, is present at all levels of education, and cuts across social class lines as determined by parental education and family income.

Borland and Wright (2000) suggest that because gifted education serves disproportionate numbers of White middle and upper middle class students, “gifted programs are serving to widen the gap between society’s ‘have’s’ and ‘have not’s’ and between White and minority families” (p. 588).

These trends are typified by a disturbing lack of studies and scholarly articles that focus on gifted culturally diverse students (Flowers, Zhang, Moore, & Flowers, 2004; Ford, 1998).

An ERIC database search revealed that between 1966 and 1996, a total of 9,801 articles focused on gifted students, with 795 of them focusing on gifted minority students. Thus, only 8% of the articles on gifted students found in the ERIC database during the past three decades focused on gifted minority students. (Ford, 1998, p. 4)

Seven years later, in 2005, a gap still existed in the gifted education literature regarding diversity issues (Ford & Milner, 2005).

Significance

While educators maintain statistics to track who is and who is not enrolled in gifted education, little is known about the long-term impact of these programs. Callahan (1992) suggests that the field of gifted education has operated with an underlying assumption that all students reap the same benefits from similar instructional strategies and curriculum. She maintains that program evaluations should do more than just determine gifted program effectiveness; they should also describe the nature of student experiences. In other words, evaluations should uncover the effect of gifted programming

on students. This impact, especially as it relates to African-American students, is largely absent from the literature (Hertzog, 2003). As Creswell (1998) states, “The strongest and most scholarly rationale for a study . . . follows from a documented need in the literature for increased understanding and dialogue about an issue” (p. 94). Beyond responding to the obvious need to examine a broader range of issues related to gifted education and diversity, this study expands the knowledge base regarding an understudied population: gifted African-American students.

This qualitative study examines the experiences of Black students who have participated in full time educational settings designed for gifted students. Within the gifted education literature, few studies focus on the voiced experiences of gifted minority students, and none look at how elementary and middle school aged Black students experience gifted education within schools or full time programs solely intended to meet the needs of gifted learners. The distinctive racial identity issues make the study of Black students especially unique in the field of gifted education.

Hearing the voices of those students who are under-represented is especially crucial for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. “So much research is done on schooling in the United States; yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspectives of the students” (Seidman, 2006, p. 10). Ayers (1990) maintains that “understanding the situation from within” (p. 272) requires asking children how they view their school experiences. He contends that scholarly research has failed to provide an “insider’s view” (p. 271). This study provides such a much needed view into the challenges faced by African-American students who have experienced gifted

programming. Additionally, this research allows educational stakeholders a novel perspective into the support systems that gifted Black students have accessed, and the impact that gifted programming has had on the lives of these students. By hearing directly from those affected, this study furthers the research on meeting the unique needs of students who are both gifted and African-American, thus adding to the limited professional literature on gifted minority students.

Purpose and Research Questions

To more fully understand how individuals, who are Black and gifted, are impacted by gifted programming and to determine what might be learned from the experiences of these students, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges did these students experience?
2. What resources and/or supports helped them face challenges?
3. What impact did their educational experiences have on their lives after leaving the school?
4. What implications do these experiences hold for gifted education and the education of gifted African-American students?

Methodology Overview

To draw out the “nuanced stories” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 22) of gifted African-American students, to appreciate the meanings attributed to their educational experiences, and to reveal the themes and implications of these stories, I used two qualitative research methodologies: oral history and educational criticism and connoisseurship. Mears (2008) notes, “A creative adaptation of aspects of these

qualitative methodologies extends the range and utility of each and broadens their potential for presentation and dissemination” (p. 417).

Oral history is a research method that involves in-depth, open-ended interviews, taped accounts, and typed transcripts. Oral history is often used to gain insight into the lives and events of ethnic minorities, immigrants, women, and labor movements and is credited for giving voice to traditionally marginalized populations (glbtq, Inc., 2004). In telling their stories through oral history interviews, participants construct past events with themselves at the center, conveying what they think is important (Bozzoli, 1998). Thus, oral history tells us less about particular events and more about the personal meaning ascribed to these events (Portelli, 1998).

While oral history techniques document the meanings that people place on their experiences, educational criticism and connoisseurship provides a framework with which to describe, interpret, and evaluate educational events and settings. Recurring themes emerge and are discussed that represent the dominant features within participant experiences and their particular contexts.

Each of the four young people who agreed to talk to me about their school experiences as gifted Black students were seventeen or eighteen years of age at the time of their interviews; old enough to reflect upon the significance of their experiences in gifted programs. Each had been enrolled in full-time gifted programs during at least five years of elementary school and/or three years of middle school. Two individuals attended different private schools serving gifted students, enrolled for all of their elementary and middle school years. Another young person attended three different magnet programs

during middle school, and the final individual attended a magnet school for gifted students from fourth through eighth grade. One of these young people was a former student of mine; one was contacted on my behalf by a colleague, and the others were referred to me by school administrators. Consent and assent forms (see Appendices A-C) were signed by parents and participants, with the assurance of confidentiality.

These young people sat for two open-ended interviews that were digitally recorded. Interviews were conducted at a site of the interviewee's choosing, and an interview guide (see Appendix D) was used to guide the interview process and both sessions. Follow-up questions were framed based upon answers that each interviewee provided. Additional questions were crafted after the first interview in order to fully explore all areas of inquiry during the second interview. Also during that second interview, each participant was encouraged to speak freely about any related topics that might have come to mind. All interviews were then transcribed and subsequent transcripts were emailed to each participant for his or her perusal. Acknowledgements of the interview content and/or comments were emailed back to me.

Dissertation Organization

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In Chapter One, the purpose, significance, and focus of the study are detailed. Chapter Two presents a review of academic literature that is germane to a deeper awareness and understanding of the educational experiences of gifted Black students. In Chapter Three, the methodology of this study is delineated, including the research method and design, data collection procedures, and my role as a researcher who is culturally different from my participants.

In Chapter Four, detailed and descriptive participant profiles are provided, including extensive excerpts from their oral histories. Drawing upon the literature, interpretations are woven through these portraits. In Chapter 5, study findings are detailed. Here, a more extensive interpretation is presented in response to the first three research questions. Themes that emerged from the data analysis thus far are presented and discussed. Finally, implications are discussed and recommendations are proffered in response to the final research question.

Definitions

The terms used in this proposal are defined differently across various fields of study and have been used in diverse ways through time. It is noted that, during different eras, these terms have met with both approval and disapproval among the general population. However, for purposes of this discussion, the following definitions will be used.

- *African-American* is defined as an American of African ethnicity whose life experiences, language usage, and ethnicity are grounded in his/her cultural group (Nieto, 2004).
- *Black* is used interchangeably with *African-American*.
- *Colorblindness* refers to a perspective and a belief that assumes “that race is a social category of no relevance to one’s behaviors and decisions . . . that individuals should not or perhaps even do not notice each other’s racial group membership” (Schofield, 2001, p. 252).

- *Culturally diverse students* are students who come from a culture other than the European-American population (Reyes-Carrasquillo, 2000).
- *Culturally responsive teaching* is defined as “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29).
- *Culture* refers to “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and world views created, shared and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion” (Nieto, 1999, p. 48).
- *Ethnicity* refers to a presumed common genealogy or ancestry by which group members identify with each other. Ethnic groups are also usually united by common cultural, behavioral, linguistic, or religious practices. In this sense, ethnic groups are also cultural communities (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2006).
- *European-American* is defined as a Caucasian American whose habits, ideals, and behaviors are grounded in European values (Nieto, 2004).
- *Giftedness* will be defined using the U.S. Department of Education’s (1993) definition as detailed on page 17.
- *Multicultural education* is an idea, a reform movement, and a process that challenges educators to change the total school environment to reflect the

diverse cultures within the classroom, the school, and the larger society, thus creating equal educational opportunities for all students (Banks, 2001).

- *Race* is used as a social construct, rather than a concept that is based upon biologically determined differences (Nieto, 2004).
- *Racelessness* is defined as “ the lack of a strong ethnic identification with the collective ethos of the African-American community or culture and the adoption of the ethos of the dominant society” (Mosely Hall, 1998, p. 55).
- *Racial identity* is used to denote that part of a person’s self-concept that is correlated to membership within an ethnic group (Sellars, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998).
- *Resilience* refers to the success of individuals who are able to adapt and thrive despite tremendous adversity.
- *White* is used interchangeably with *European American*.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The research questions for this study examine the intersection of three areas: gifted education, African-American learners, and culturally responsive practices. While there is ample literature relating to gifted education, a growing body of research on African-American students, and emerging research on culturally responsive pedagogy, this literature review is not intended to summarize and integrate all of the research from each of these areas. Thus, it does not focus on all topics related to gifted education; only that literature related to gifted students from African-American backgrounds. This literature review does not explore all of the research related to African-American learners, but does concentrate on the specific research that provides insight into the challenges of being both gifted and African-American. Finally, this literature review examines how culturally responsive practices are interwoven through the discussion of effectively educating gifted African-American students.

Throughout the review of the literature, generalizations are made regarding gifted education, gifted students, African-American learners, and the African-American culture. These descriptors are intended to serve as broad paint strokes with which to better understand the philosophies, issues, and challenges under discussion. Though grouped for discussion, gifted students display a broad range of unique behaviors and characteristics. Likewise, African-American learners remain highly diverse individuals, as well as unique

members of their cultural group. The attempt to discuss distinctive tendencies and similarities within these groups of students is undertaken in the spirit of increasing understanding and awareness, rather than creating and/or perpetuating stereotypes.

This literature review will focus on the following aspects of educating gifted African-American students, using a structure adapted from Shore, Cornell, Robinson, and Ward (1991).

I. Challenges Faced by Gifted African-American Students

A. Social Policies

1. Advocacy and administration
2. Identification and assessment
3. Teacher competencies and perceptions

B. Curricular and Instruction Issues

1. Curricular content
2. Learning environment
3. Teaching/learning process
4. Student products

C. Social and Emotional Issues

1. Social and emotional adjustment
2. Racial identity

II. Key Resources and Supports for Gifted African-American Students

- A. Parental support
- B. Professional support
- C. Community support

III. Impact of Gifted Programming on African-American Students

Challenges Faced by Gifted African-American Students

Who is classified as gifted is not a function of nature, but relies on a socially constructed, context specific construct (Borland & Wright, 2000). “It is a concept that was created by human beings” (p. 589) and shaped by prevailing values, thus representing the society in which individuals live. Therefore, the majority of students in gifted programming in the United States represent our dominant culture, and gifted education is a function of national, state, and local policies and long-standing belief systems and practices.

These policies, beliefs, and practices underlie many of the challenges faced by gifted Black students. What follows is a review of the relevant literature, presented to examine how such guidelines, attitudes, and procedures, as well as issues related to social/emotional adjustment and racial identity, frame and impact the participation of African-American students in gifted programming.

Social Policy Issues

According to Gallagher (2002), effective social policy answers the following questions about the allocation of scarce financial resources: “Who receives the resources? Who delivers the resources? What are the resources to be delivered? What are the

conditions under which the resources are delivered?” (p. 12-13). The educational policies of states and school districts often determine the fate of gifted children, especially culturally diverse gifted children. Sometimes these policies have been crafted to serve the general school population, and sometimes they have been created to meet the needs of gifted children. Sometimes these policies reflect what we know from the most recent research and sometimes they are woefully out of date (Gallagher, 2002). Rarely do they consider the needs of the culturally diverse gifted student.

Advocacy and administration. Advocacy for culturally diverse populations must first address the inequities in minority representation in gifted programs. In an interview with Grantham (2002), Dr. Mary Frasier maintained that this under-representation will take time to resolve and should be viewed as a complex interaction of factors. Callahan (2005) contends that some of these factors are related to deeply held beliefs and some are related to longstanding practices.

One such barrier to appropriate identification for and participation in gifted programming involves attitudes that poor and culturally diverse students cannot be gifted (Callahan, 2005, Grantham, 2002; Hilliard, 2003; Perry, 2003; Steele, 2003). “There is a belief system and a behavior system in education, and in the supporting academic disciplines, that provide the rationale for the continuation of brutal pessimism with respect to African [American] students and for inappropriate pedagogical responses to the African [American] condition” (Hilliard, p. 141). Borland and Wright (2000) suggest that the culture dependent concept of giftedness “has embedded in it the basis for the under-

representation of certain groups outside the mainstream of any culture in which the concept is employed” (p. 589).

Because of the belief that culturally diverse and/or low income students lack basic skills and experiences, and are incapable of exhibiting gifted abilities or talents, these children are often “served” through remedial practices. “Without the opportunity to experience the kinds of tasks associated with the development of these abilities, the likelihood that children will exhibit such skills in classrooms or on tests is severely diminished” (Callahan, 2005, p. 99). Thus, culturally diverse students who do not display traditional gifted behaviors are not provided opportunities to develop, strengthen, and use skills and talents such as critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. To serve a broader range of students, Callahan suggests that gifted services be delivered along a continuum and that the curriculum should be modified according to student need. Data gleaned from the assessment process should be used to drive the creation of educational programs that meet the needs of all students (Briggs & Reis, 2004; Callahan, 2005). Borland (2003) advocates for an extreme alternative; the elimination of all gifted programming and the differentiation of curriculum and instruction for all students and their diverse needs. “In an ideal educational world, special education, including gifted education, would not be necessary because curricula would be sufficiently responsive to individual differences to make separating children into exceptionality categories unnecessary” (Borland & Wright, 2000, p. 591).

Other school policies and procedures interfere with the identification of under-represented gifted students. These include the lack of fair and appropriate referral and

assessment instruments (Grantham, 2002). This compelling issue is discussed in greater detail in its own section to come. Many schools have a limit on the number of students who can be served in their gifted programs. Such a practice invites competition for these spots and encourages a misleading perspective that the number of gifted students in the population is set (Callahan, 2005).

Across the United States, definitions of giftedness vary widely (National Research Council, 2002) as researchers have debated for years as to how to define giftedness (Briggs & Reis, 2004). The 1993 report *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* issued by the U. S. Department of Education (USDE) calls for a broad definition to “serve a wider range of talented students” (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, Executive Summary, ¶7). The USDE uses the following definition:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (Executive Summary, ¶9)

While the USDE's definition recognizes that giftedness exists across all cultural groups and economic levels, Ford (1995) warns that using the USDE definition may encourage a narrow focus on intellectual and academic achievement and may overlook students with talents in other realms. Bonner (2000) cautions that the definitions of giftedness used in most states are to blame for the under-identification of Black students. He maintains that gifted programs should have a tight correlation between their definition of giftedness, their identification process, and their educational programming.

Solutions to these complex challenges should include broadening the discussion on intelligence and giftedness; acknowledging that giftedness exists within all cultural groups and across all socioeconomic levels; agreeing theoretically and practically on what a gifted program is; understanding that tackling under-representation should involve educating teachers, parents, and community members; and making choices to concentrate efforts on finding unrecognized gifted children (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Grantham, 2002). Identifying the gifts and talents of culturally diverse learners will require new paradigms, including the acknowledgment that these talents should be viewed within their sociocultural and economic context (Briggs & Reis, 2004). Gifted programs should be planned by small groups of staff, and must be supported by a committed administrator. Programs should include both traditional and nontraditional elements and should be implemented without apology and over explanation (Grantham, 2002). To achieve equity for all students, the previously detailed solutions are critical, as well as a fair and unbiased student identification process (Gallagher, 2002).

Identification and assessment. Borland and Wright (2000) suggest that “identification is at the crux of the problem of under-representation” (p. 591). They maintain that educators either live with the inequities, serve children and their spectrum of needs without placing them in categories, or modify the identification process. Because the majority of educators cannot fathom the first two options, most discussions regarding identification involve modifying the identification process. Rhodes (1992) maintains, “any process which evaluates Black students categorically rather than individually is discriminatory” (p. 110).

The use of IQ as an identification tool is a strongly supported practice (Shore et al., 1991). In fact, almost 90% of states rely on IQ or achievement tests as their sole instrument for determining placement in gifted programs (Ford, 1995). However, viewing intelligence and giftedness strictly from the vantage point of intelligence tests limits the ways that educators can define and capture the assets of culturally diverse learners (Ford & Grantham, 2003). The use of standardized test data also places Black students at a disadvantage as it, too, represents a bank of knowledge representative of White middle class culture (Bonner, 2000; Rhodes, 1992). Robert Sternberg has been widely quoted as saying “What is valued as gifted in one culture may not be valued as gifted in another culture” (Ford & Grantham, p. 219).

Hilliard (2003) maintains that IQ tests are actually achievements tests that are biased toward students who have had the opportunity and privilege to be exposed to what is being measured. He notes that the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences has concluded “that IQ tests are worthless for making decisions about student placement in programs for those who are . . . gifted” (p. 136). Slocumb (2001) suggests that identifying giftedness in children of poverty “presents the greatest challenge” (p. 6) because the dearth of experiences and resources is not acknowledged within the identification process. “When gifted children are identified on the basis of traditional measures without factoring in the impact of the environment, what gets identified is opportunity and not giftedness” (p. 9). Thus, gifted programs that rely on intelligence tests continue to see the inclusion of White, middle class students and the exclusion of culturally diverse students, especially those from lower socioeconomic income levels.

Educators should look to contemporary theories of intelligence, such as Sternberg's (1985) Triarchic Theory of Intelligence, Renzulli's (1986) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness, and/or Gardner's (1983) Multiple Intelligence Theory (Bonner, 2000; Callahan, 2005; Ford & Grantham, 2003), to broaden their perspectives of "the multifaceted, complex nature of intelligence" (Ford & Grantham, p. 219) and to acknowledge that giftedness exists within all cultural groups and across all socioeconomic levels. According to Callahan, the search for a single, unbiased assessment of intelligence to substitute for currently used intelligence tests seems inadequate, hypocritical, and ineffectual in regards to finding nontraditional students. Assessments must be reliable and valid, and should include authentic performances, with documentation occurring over time.

Shore and colleagues (1991) suggest that identification of gifted children be based upon multiple criteria. For gifted African-American students, this is especially important (Briggs & Reis, 2004; Callahan, 2005). In the report, *Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education*, the National Research Council's Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education (National Research Council, 2002) maintains that insufficient research on IQ testing and its validity warrant the need for multiple means of assessment. "It reduces the risk of error, either missing a qualified child or, more grievously, wrongly excluding a child from special services. It serves social justice by increasing the possibility of recognition to poor, minority, and other . . . groups of children" (p. 49). More inclusive assessments include student portfolios, performance assessments, culturally sensitive tests, and checklists of creative and gifted

characteristics. Other strategies include nominations from parents and classmates, staff development, and file screenings (Briggs & Reiss, 2004; Ford, 1995). “Educators should focus identification decisions on the strengths of individual students, both in and out of school, rather than the generalized descriptors for the dominant group that may not match the unique characteristics of diverse cultures” (Briggs & Reiss, p. 13).

Understanding that underlying cultural values and traditions differ dramatically between Black and White students holds critical implications for effectively identifying gifted African-American students (Ford & Harris, 1999; Rhodes, 1992). “If misunderstood . . . teachers will not recognize the strengths that African-American students bring into the classroom, resulting in decreased opportunities for these students to be recognized and identified as gifted” (Ford, 1995, p. 55). Clark (1997) suggests that educators look for those intellectual abilities that are common to all gifted students, regardless of their culture. These include a strong desire to learn; intense, and sometimes, unusual interests; an unusual ability to articulate ideas; inventive problem solving strategies; exceptional retention; extensive inquiries; quick grasp of new concepts and connections; originality; and a keen sense of humor.

To adequately recognize and refer gifted African-American students, teachers need to have background knowledge of giftedness, in addition to an appreciation of cultural differences. Bonner (2000) describes research where junior high teachers were able to identify only 45% of the gifted students in their classes and kindergarten teachers only 10%. Although these findings do not examine the issue of identifying culturally diverse students specifically, they point to the lack of teacher training and identification

accuracy. “Without proper training, teachers will continue to refer only those students who fit their preconceived ideas of how a gifted student behaves; this misconception immediately rules out many students who, by current definition, show gifted potential” (Bonner, p. 655). Rhodes (1992) suggests that teachers need additional assistance from gifted coordinators to understand the bias of standardized testing, the causes of underachievement, and the unique characteristics of Black learners. Teachers who are not aware of the characteristics and needs of gifted children, and issues surrounding culturally diverse gifted children tend to be ineffective at identifying gifted students (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Thus, policies and practices that place teachers as the gatekeepers of gifted programs work against culturally diverse students. When teachers are the first or only step in the referral process, culturally diverse students tend to be overlooked for inclusion in gifted programs. Even when culturally diverse students have high achievement scores, they tend to go unnoticed and are not referred by their teachers (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, and Holloway (2005) found that teachers were more likely to refer students of unspecified ethnicity for placement in gifted programs than Black students with identical background information. These findings suggest that teachers are considering informal information, such as student ethnicity, when making referrals for gifted programming, and that a link exists between teacher bias against Black students and their under-representation in gifted programming.

Educators advocating for culturally diverse students call for opportunities in talent development (Borland & Wright, 2000; Callahan, 2005; Gallagher, 2002; Grantham, 2002). When interviewed by Grantham (2002), Frasier maintained that giftedness is not

just displaying talent in areas that have already been discovered: “Giftedness is about developing new pathways that we have not taken because we didn’t know that they existed” (p. 50). Thus, talents not typically associated with traditional academic success should be honored and scrutinized to see if they represent unique manifestations of giftedness as displayed in under-represented groups (Baldwin, 2001; Boykin, 1994; Briggs & Reis, 2004; Callahan, 2005; Ford & Grantham, 2003). Talent development programs should be instituted in primary grades and identification of giftedness should be started early and done often. These two interventions should be implemented together so teachers are looking for and building talents on a consistent, ongoing basis.

Teacher competencies and perceptions. Although the literature on gifted education is replete with descriptions of the characteristics and competencies necessary to teach gifted students, little is written about the characteristics and competencies needed to work with gifted, culturally and/or linguistically diverse students (Ford & Trotman, 2001).

The literature on culturally responsive teaching (Foster, 1994; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994) details the characteristics of exemplary teachers. These include the motivation to develop caring relationships with students and their families, the conscientiousness to accept responsibility for their students’ successes and failures, the desire to increase personal cultural awareness and competence, and the knowledge and proficiency to incorporate multiculturalism into the curriculum. Ladson-Billings notes that successful teachers of African-American students have a high regard for their profession, themselves, and others; see themselves, and are perceived, as part of the

community; regard teaching as giving back to the community; consider all students capable of meeting high expectations; recognize that students come to school with prior knowledge and capabilities that teachers must purposefully and skillfully access; and help students make connections between their lives, their neighborhoods, and the larger world.

Culturally responsive teachers seek equity for their students by holding high expectations, ensuring equal educational experiences, and promoting a communal and successful learning environment for all students. They create classrooms where the philosophy is student centered and holistic (teaching the whole child) and multiple perspectives, social justice, and real issues are integral to their curricula. Respect for students' home languages is shown and instruction is modified to make school compatible with student learning styles. Teachers use multiple assessments and recognize that traditional assessments do not adequately measure the strengths of culturally diverse students (Ford & Trotman, 2001). Additional critical teacher competencies include understanding testing and assessment in order to interpret and analyze scores meaningfully; matching services to student needs; recognizing both test bias and fair testing; and understanding how teaching affects student testing (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

To clarify and describe the characteristics and competencies crucial to teaching gifted African-American students, Ford and Trotman (2001) combine the traits of effective teachers in gifted education with those traits found in culturally responsive teachers. These characteristics and competencies include (a) knowledge of the nature and needs of students who are gifted and culturally diverse, (b) talent in developing methods and materials for use with students who are gifted and culturally diverse, (c) aptitude in

addressing individual and cultural differences, (d) ability to recognize the strengths of students who are gifted and culturally diverse, (e) capacity to develop a student's sense of self as a gifted individual, (f) skill in counseling students who are gifted and culturally diverse, and (g) faculty in creating an environment in which gifted culturally diverse students feel challenged and safe to explore and express their uniqueness (Ford & Trotman, 2001, figure 2).

Gifted African-American students in Harmon's (2002) study describe effective teachers as those who teach in ways that facilitate optimal student learning. Students depict these teachers as caring, respectful, fair, and involved in their lives. Successful educators teach using a variety of sensory modalities, teaching styles, and principles of differentiation. These teachers incorporate multiculturalism into lessons daily, allowing students to find validation and relevance in their school lives. Further, these teachers hold high academic and behavioral expectations for their students, knowing that they can easily achieve and behave, and that the broader world will probably demand more from them, as African-Americans, than from their European-American classmates. Effective teachers also address student concerns and discuss topics of relevance in class.

Most importantly, effective teachers view their students' differences as assets from which to build, rather than deficits from which to blame.

The talents of disadvantaged and minority children have been especially neglected. Almost one in four American children lives in poverty, representing an enormous pool of untapped talent. Yet most programs for these children focus on solving the problems they bring to school, rather than on challenging them to develop their strengths. It is sometimes assumed that children from unpromising backgrounds are not capable of outstanding accomplishment. Yet stories abound of disadvantaged children who achieve at high levels when nurtured sufficiently. (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, Part I, ¶4)

Ford and Grantham (2003) suggest that the deficit mindset of educators is responsible for the under-representation of culturally diverse students in gifted programs. They challenge educators to transform deficit thinking into perspectives that lead to positive and constructive changes in how culturally diverse students are perceived. For teachers to understand the assets their students bring to school, they need to be prepared for and responsive to diversity. “There is no such thing as a homogeneous classroom, for students in classrooms differ by gender, race, socioeconomic status, achievement, interests, and so forth” (p. 221). Therefore, teachers must be equipped to be “students of their students” (Nieto, 1999, p. 142) and shift their thinking from focusing on deficits to building student assets (Benson, 1997). The recognition of a student’s culture can play a decisive role in the likelihood that he/she will be considered for and experience success in gifted programming. Culturally diverse students referred for gifted programming are nominated “by teachers who have the knowledge, understanding, awareness, and appreciation of their own culture as well as their students’ cultures” (Briggs & Reiss, 2004, p. 14).

Grantham’s (2004) study illustrates the key role that teachers of gifted Black students can play in changing the stereotype of Black males and in advocating for them, especially as participants in gifted programs and classes. Study findings indicate that teachers should begin to work with Black males in the early grades to acquire the skills (such as organization, time management, and study habits) that will promote success in school. In addition, teachers can serve as positive motivators, mentors, and role models that encourage, affirm, and nurture academic potential in African-American students.

Finally, teachers need to understand African-American identity issues and establish learning environments where “achievement is neither ‘acting White’ nor ‘acting Black’” (p. 214).

The lack of teacher preparedness is another barrier to delivering high quality gifted programming to culturally diverse students. Educating teachers to be culturally aware, sensitive, competent, and responsive is the challenge of teacher preparation programs. However, in most teacher preparation programs, multicultural courses are included as added extras to traditional teacher education classes. Further, multicultural courses are not widely offered or are offered as optional. As expected, this approach provides limited long-term effects on the perspectives, ideas, and teaching practices of preservice teachers (Lin Goodwin, 1997; Zeichner, 1993). In one study (Larke, 1990), even after taking a multicultural education course, preservice teachers continued to feel uncomfortable working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families, and even showed subtle to obvious forms of racism.

If teacher education programs were successful in educating teachers for diversity, we might not have today such a massive reluctance by beginning teachers to work in urban schools and in other schools serving poor and ethnic and linguistic minority students. Educating teachers for diversity must include attention to the quality of instruction that will be offered by these teachers. More of the same kind of teaching, which has largely failed to provide even a minimally adequate education to poor and ethnic and linguistic minority students, does not improve the situation. (Zeichner, p. 3)

Many veteran teachers were not required to take multicultural training within their teacher preparation programs leaving them with a limited understanding of multicultural education (Briggs & Reis, 2004) despite the increasingly multicultural makeup of their classrooms (Dilworth & Brown, 2001).

Teacher preparation programs should focus on changing teachers' attitudes and experiences through ongoing and relevant contact with culturally and linguistically diverse children, and through the use of multicultural principles and approaches (Elhoweris et al., 2005). Teachers using high ability curricular materials designed to develop talent (through increased rigor, higher order thinking skills, engagement in learning, richer content, and so on) reported attitudinal shifts about the capabilities of their students. Some teachers "talked about their dawning awareness that they had underestimated their students" (Swanson, 2006, p. 22).

Gallavan (1998) notes reasons why teachers do not provide their students with valuable multicultural experiences. These include limited awareness of the elements of multicultural education, the use of ineffective practices, and little motivation, as well as resistance, to learning effective multicultural practices. Hilliard (2003) concurs and contends that successful teachers of African-American students worry about their students' opportunities to learn and about their own teaching, not about their students' purported intellectual abilities. He maintains that the answer to successfully educating African-American students is outstanding teaching, deep subject matter knowledge, strong school leadership, focused teacher education programs, and a society committed to delivering high quality education to African-American children.

Curriculum and Instruction Issues

Delivering curricular options that match the unique needs and characteristics of learners that are different from other students is an important goal of both gifted education and multicultural education (Briggs & Reis, 2004; Ford, 2004). However, both

fields have met ongoing misunderstanding and opposition, resulting in the “educational neglect” (Ford, p. 71) of gifted students, particularly gifted students of culturally diverse backgrounds.

Research has found that culturally diverse students perform positively when interventions and educational strategies affirm and build on their cultures (Nieto, 1999). However, African-American students still voice their dissatisfaction regarding the lack of diversity in the curriculum (Ford & Harris, 1999). Afrocentrists have long asserted that when students are grounded in their own cultural heritage, they are motivated to learn and perform better, and are better behaved (Gay, 2000). However, African-American students still express their disinterest in the curriculum presented in their schools and in their gifted programs (Ford & Harris). African-American students achieve levels of academic performance equal to successful peers when learning tasks contain certain elements derived from their cultural experiences, such as working communally, working to music, and allowing for movement (Allen & Boykin, 1992). However, these strategies are often seen as unfair and and/or disruptive in school.

To meet the dual needs of learners who are both gifted and African-American, educators must consider strategies from gifted education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and multicultural education, as well as combining strategies from these fields (Ford, 2004; Ford & Harris, 1999). To organize and examine strategies from these fields, a framework proposed by Maker (1982a) will be used that examines modifications to the curricular content, the learning environment, the teaching/learning process, and student products. These modifications serve to meet the needs of gifted students. “The most basic

principle underlying curriculum development for the gifted is that the experiences for these children must be qualitatively different from the basic program provided for all children” (Maker, 1982a, p. 3). Furthermore, “the distinctiveness of African-American culture...require[s] educational approaches that value, respect, and *use* the cultural knowledge and competence of African-American people” (King, 1994, p. 27).

Curricular content. The content of the curriculum includes the theories, information, facts, ideas, and skills that are presented to students. According to Maker (1982b), modifications to the content of gifted programming should focus on abstract and complex concepts, and varied and novel ideas. Curricular content should be organized to facilitate effective and efficient learning and understanding, and should include the study of creative individuals and methods of inquiry from different disciplines.

Teachers of gifted students, who often are called upon to develop curriculum, should recognize that their cultural perspectives impact what is taught and how it is taught (Milner & Ford, 2005). As the vast majority of teachers are European American, a cultural mismatch often exists between teachers and culturally diverse students (Villegas, 1988). Thus, it should not be surprising that a focus on multicultural education has been noticeably absent from the literature on gifted education (Ford & Harris, 1999, p. xi). Differing approaches to multicultural education (Banks, 2001, 2003; Ford & Harris; Grant & Sleeter, 2003; Milner & Ford) can be examined as a process of modifying curricular content to better serve the needs of gifted African-American students.

Grant and Sleeter (2003) provide a framework for examining five different teaching approaches that address human diversity. The curricular component for the first

approach focuses on the development of traditional academic basics by students who are “exceptional and culturally different” (p. 11). While Nieto (1999) maintains that some culturally diverse students need to be taught how to “do school” (p. 71) in order to be successful, Ford and Harris (1999) warn that this approach could be seen as moving culturally diverse students toward assimilation, with student differences seen as deficits. The second approach proposed by Grant and Sleeter promotes and encourages respect through a focus on interpersonal and intergroup awareness and relationships. While it is important to develop a greater awareness and appreciation for others, this approach has been perceived as superficial (Ford & Harris). Studying a single group of people (such as women or Latinos) allows students to gain an appreciation for the history, perspective, culture, and current issues of that particular group (Grant & Sleeter). However, this strategy may provide students with a narrow and disjointed view of cultural knowledge and understanding. In addition, newly gained insight and understanding of the studied group may not necessarily equate to an increased sensitivity to another marginalized group (Ford & Harris). The fourth multicultural approach proposes that curricular materials and content represent all cultural groups equally (Grant & Sleeter). While this approach resolves the curricular challenge presented by the single group study, it does not consider larger issues that may impact student learning (Ford & Harris). The final approach to multiculturalism detailed by Grant and Sleeter “places justice, democracy, and sustainability at the center” (p. 295) through a study of oppression, and the use of critical questioning, democratic decision making, and social action. This final approach to

multiculturalism exemplifies the most comprehensive view of culture and allows students to be active participants in social change (Ford & Harris).

Banks' (2003) model of multicultural education details four approaches to integrating multicultural content into the curriculum. Using the contributions approach, the traditional curriculum remains relatively the same, while discrete cultural elements, such as heroes, holidays, and foods are added. While this approach is the easiest to implement, and thus the most common, it does not allow students to gain an in-depth appreciation of the significant role that cultural groups have played in our society. The second method, the additive approach, involves adding content, concepts, themes, and perspectives into the curriculum without altering it in any substantial manner. With this approach, other cultures and their contributions continue to be viewed from a mainstream perspective. The transformative approach differs from the preceding methodologies as it changes the underlying assumptions of the curriculum and encourages students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from multiple and diverse perspectives. The final approach of Banks' multicultural education model includes the elements of the transformative approach, but also requires students to make decisions and to take action on issues or problems they have studied. In addition to these levels of content integration, Banks (2001) details the knowledge construction process as an important dimension of multicultural education. Here, teachers guide their students in recognizing and understanding how cultural assumptions, viewpoints, and biases within a discipline impact how knowledge is constructed and used.

Ford and Harris (1999) have combined the content integration levels of Banks (2001, 2003) with Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy, a commonly used model of higher level thinking. By synthesizing the strategies and goals of these two approaches, Ford and Harris have developed a model of multicultural gifted education, designated as the Ford-Harris matrix. By analyzing curriculum within this matrix, teachers can develop and implement curriculum that promotes the highest levels of thinking, as well as the highest levels of multiculturalism. The multicultural gifted education model is more likely to meet student needs through an understanding and awareness of individual abilities and variables such as culture, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic level. Excellence is achieved through high standards coupled with curricular and instructional modifications delivered by teachers trained to work with gifted and culturally diverse students (Ford & Harris; Ford & Milner, 2005).

Learning environment. The learning environment refers to both the physical and the psychological setting in which learning occurs (Maker, 1982b), and creating an atmosphere of student centeredness, independence, openness, acceptance, complexity, and high mobility for gifted learners.

Modifications to the psychological learning environment include the acceptance of and accommodation for individual learning preferences. Gifted children tend to exhibit independence, integrated perceptual strengths, persistence, preference for quiet and solitary learning environments, nonconformity, intuition, and high self-motivation (Treffinger & Selby, 1993). However, if educators hold these characteristics as

representative of all gifted students, this holds grave implications for effectively teaching gifted African-American students.

Researchers (Ford, 1995; Ford & Milner, 2005; Hale, 2001) note differences in learning preferences between African-American and European-American learners. While these preferences are linked to African-American learners in general, applying this knowledge to gifted African-American learners is important to their success in gifted programming. “The intent is to create a learning environment that complements the culture of the African-American community and stimulates higher order thinking and creativity among African-American children” (Hale, p. 122)

Hale (2001) notes that African-American students discover and understand more when their learning is focused on social relationships rather than on objects, and when teaching and learning occurs within small groups. A strong oral tradition is part of the African-American culture and this asset should be leveraged to maximize learning. Generally, African-American students tend to be field dependent, and are perceived as holistic, intuitive, and concrete and relational thinkers who are likely to prefer communal learning experiences (Bonner, 2000; Daniels, 2002; Ford, 1995; Ford & Milner, 2005; Shade, 1994). African-American students are likely to be tactile, kinesthetic learners and are more successful when actively involved in their learning (Boykin, 1994; Daniels; Ford & Milner; Hale). The physical learning environment should be arranged strategically to complement these needs. The teacher’s desk should be placed near the students, student desks or tables should be arranged to promote communal and cooperative learning, and the room could be rearranged periodically throughout the year

to heighten student interest (Brown & Kysilka, 2002; Shade & New, 1993). Students should have easy access to supplies, resources, and their work products. Classroom resources and displays should reflect multicultural perspectives and should be free from bias and stereotypes.

Success in the traditional classroom environment requires conformity, passivity, and quietness, and is based upon teacher directed activities and student participation that is individualistic and competitive (Shade & New, 1993). However, the majority of African-American students entering today's classrooms have a different cultural orientation than the one valued in schools (Shade, 1994). Many of these children have been socialized in urban settings characterized by unique patterns of behaviors, communication, and expectations, including a constant change of focus and interest (Shade; Shade & New). Thus it is not surprising that many urban students find school monotonous and mind numbing.

The needs of African-American learners are typical of those of extroverted personalities (Shade & New, 1993) who seek strong sensory stimulation. Boykin (1994) denotes this as "verve" (p. 249) within his nine dimensions of African-American expression; "a propensity for relatively high levels of stimulation and for action that is energetic and lively" (Hale, 2001, p. 116). This tendency toward verve is interconnected with other dimensions of African-American expression: the need for movement, an emphasis on emotional expressiveness (affect), a commitment to social relationships (communalism), distinctive personalities and a penchant for spontaneous expression (expressive individualism), and oral communication that may be viewed as performance

(oral tradition). Although this active and expressive behavior is often viewed as disruptive in traditional learning environments (Shade & New), African-American learners participate appropriately in dynamic, engaging, varied, and captivating settings (Hale).

“One of the most prevalent examples of cultural behavior hindering teaching and learning in the traditional classroom is the African-American practice of ‘breaking in and talking over people’” (Shade, 1994, p. 182). Although this “participatory-interactive” (Gay, 2000, p. 91) form of communication is well established in the African-American community, teachers often view this as speaking out of turn and, subsequently, reprimand students for it (Gay; Shade). Teachers often find it difficult to follow the speech and writing of African-American students as these students tend to think, speak, and write in a looping, circular fashion versus the linear speech of White students. This topic-associative style is characterized by multiple topics, inferred relationships, and explanations that build on one another. It takes time for Black students to articulate their thoughts and often, in busy classrooms, they don’t have adequate time to express what they really know (Gay).

When asked questions in a traditional school setting, many African-American students answer with minimal or no responses. Insight into the traditional African-American community reveals that children are not expected to be information providers and are not usually asked direct questions (Shade & New, 1993). This can create stress for the gifted Black student who is expected to give detailed, elaborate responses and explanations to the teacher who may not be culturally knowledgeable. Another difference

in interaction styles is the dramatic flair with which many African-American children speak (Shade, 1994). Together with the previously detailed communication modes, these differences often prompt teachers to try to rid students of such habits and replace them with those that represent European-American styles of communication. “Teachers may not realize that by doing this they could be causing irreversible damage to students’ abilities or inclination to engage fully in the instructional process” (Gay, 2000, p. 93). Rejection of student communication styles is a rejection of individual culture, and personal identity and worth (Gay).

To consider and differentiate for these approaches to communication, teachers can develop an awareness and appreciation of cultural differences, encourage differing styles within the classroom, and provide students with ample time to demonstrate their understandings (Daniels, 2002; Shade & New, 1993). A striking example of using cultural communication preferences is the participation (and success) of urban students in Mock Trial competitions. Traditionally dominated by elite, predominantly White schools, the pace and performance level of this “intellectual sport” (Hilliard, 2003, p. 145), has increased dramatically because of the highly effective communication skills of inner city Black students.

The high level of emotional expressiveness and the importance of social relationships hold significance for African-American learners on another level as well. African-American students tend to place more importance on the people in the learning environment, particularly the teacher, than on the physical aspects of the classroom or the school. Further, they tend to decide how involved they are going to be in an activity

based upon the interpersonal expectations of the task and the potential social effects of the situation. Thus, “African-American students rely on their perception of the teacher and the affective aspects of the environment to determine their involvement with learning” (Shade, 1994, p. 179). African-American students’ learning is highly correlated with warm and supportive teachers (Gay, 2000; Shade).

Teachers who really care about students honor their humanity, hold them in high esteem, expect high performance from them, and use strategies to fulfill their expectations. The heart of the educational process is the interactions that occur between teachers and students. (Gay, p. 46-47)

The kind of caring, essential to a culturally responsive learning environment, includes high student expectations (Briggs & Reiss, 2004; Gay; Hale, 2001; Hilliard, 2003). A culturally responsive teacher will work with each student to ensure personal and educational success. Teachers who display genuine care and concern for their students engender higher levels of achievement and success than those teachers who do not (Gay). “Environments that are both critical and empowering are not created overnight; they are developed and sustained through the relationships formed in classrooms between and among teachers, students, and families” (Nieto, 1999, p. 131).

Teaching/learning process. Modifying the teaching process for gifted students includes the use of open-endedness questions and activities, rapid pacing and variety, freedom of choice, structured group activities, and simulation games. Enhancing teaching and learning also involves the development of thinking skills in students such as higher levels of thinking and inductive reasoning (Maker, 1982b). To meet the needs of gifted African-American students, teachers must combine these modifications with those required of culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2000) suggests that teachers maintain a

bidirectional approach and change “instructional practices to make them more culturally responsive to ethnic and cultural diversity, while teaching students of color how to better negotiate mainstream educational structures” (p. 95). Nieto (1999) also suggests that many culturally diverse students should be taught explicitly how to “do school” (p. 71) by their teachers who serve as cultural mediators.

African-American students prefer and require a great deal of information presented at a constantly varied pace. African-American students, gifted or not, have little patience for boredom, tedium, and low level, passive activities (Shade, 1994). “Teachers who wish to ensure African-American children are engaged in tasks may find it beneficial to include visual and kinesthetic materials as an important part of the learning process that supplements the traditional aural and print related activities” (p. 185). To accommodate the learning preferences of African-Americans, Shade suggests a series of adaptations be made to curricular materials and teaching strategies. Ironically, these modifications are the same as those identified for gifted learners and include using a unit based, integrated curriculum that spirals to scaffold students to higher levels of knowledge and deeper levels of understanding over time. Thinking skills are taught and modeled to develop logical reasoning. Finally, directed inquiry and project-oriented lessons are used where students are able to analyze real-life situations and apply knowledge to genuine problems.

Examining real life situations and solving genuine problems is a component of constructivism, a philosophy based on the idea that people construct their own understandings of the world in which they live (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Many of the

elements of constructivism fit with multicultural education (Brown & Kysilka, 2002) and with the modifications proposed by Maker (1982a) for gifted students. Constructivist teachers encourage and accept student independence, responsibility, and initiative, and provide students with learning choices. Students are encouraged to offer their varied perspectives, which teachers use to steer their teaching and subsequent student learning. As the term implies, constructivism involves learning through personal experience, varied resources and materials, and other people and their perspectives. Through these learning experiences, students are exposed to a multitude of views and are encouraged to wrestle with the contradictions between these views and their own. They are also encouraged to voice their understandings of concepts, develop their own thoughts, and engage in dialogues and discussions (Brooks & Brooks; Brown & Kysilka). The attitudes, skills, and behaviors encouraged in the constructivist classroom are those needed to participate actively and responsibly in a pluralistic society (Brown & Kysilka).

African-American students tend to learn more effectively through observation, modeling, and demonstration rather than through passive means of receiving information, such as direct instruction (Shade, 1994). African-American students use not only their prior experiences, but also their race, to organize and recall information. “The idea of multicultural education is not merely a request for cosmetic changes. Texts, materials, examples, and projects [should be] directly related to the African-American child . . . to ensure processing and acquisition of the information” (p. 181).

Student products. Student products are the end result of teaching and learning, and represent an original depiction of student understanding and creativity. Products should

represent the transformation of existing information rather than being mere summaries of other people's conclusions. Using higher levels of thinking, creativity and inventiveness, and discovery, students take in information and then transform it to express their own perspectives, meanings, and emotions (Maker, 1982a).

Nurturing creativity is a recommended practice for all children, especially those deemed gifted (Shore et al., 1991). However, few theorists have discussed the issue of creativity in Black children (Baldwin, 2001). Baldwin cites Torrance as one of the few researchers who has been vocal regarding creativity in Black children, maintaining that culturally diverse young people need educational programs based upon their "creative positives" (Torrance, Goff, & Satterfield, 1998, p. 19). These positive traits include the abilities to express feelings and emotions; improvise with commonplace materials; articulate in role-playing and storytelling; be fluent and flexible in nonverbal media; respond to the concrete and/or the kinesthetic; be expressive in gesture, body language, humor, and speech; generate original ideas and use problem solving; and be emotionally responsive and problem centered. In addition, Torrance's positive positives include the enjoyment of and ability in visual arts, creative movement, dance, dramatics, music, rhythm, group activities, and/or problem solving. The final characteristics include a richness of informal language and the ability to warm up quickly. Torrance's list of creative positives has been used repeatedly because it is based upon an asset-building model, rather than a deficit model (Baldwin). Many of Torrance's creative positives correlate with Boykin's (1994) previously detailed dimensions of African-American expression. Many of these traits have been viewed as deficits within school settings

because teachers do not know how to build from these strengths and enrich the school experience for African-American students (Baldwin; Shade & New, 1993).

Educators in both general and gifted education (Dewey, 1938; Maker, 1982a; Renzulli, 1977) have long advocated for the solving of real problems in the classroom. Milner and Ford (2005) emphasize that teaching is a social, personal, and cultural process; a form of social action; a preparation for life; and a form of student transformation. Teaching should not include a colorblind, politically correct slant, as education must prepare young people to tackle the realities and challenges of society. “Every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experience of a deeper and more expansive quality” (Dewey, p. 47). A natural next step in solving real problems is having real audiences. While Maker (1982b) suggests that modifications for gifted students include an authentic and interested audience, she notes that a “simulated audience” (p. 7) might be used. Education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist, as proposed in Grant and Sleeter’s (2003) fifth approach to multiculturalism, promotes both real problems and real audiences through a commitment to equity and equality. “Students are empowered to take learning from the classroom to the real world” (Ford & Harris, 1999, p. 31) and join or start organizations that work for social change. In Banks’ (2001, 2003) model of multicultural education, the social action approach enables students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from multiple perspectives, and requires students to make decisions and take action related to real life situations. This approach allows students to obtain the skills necessary to participate in meaningful social change.

Social and Emotional Issues

While it is commonly accepted that self-concept and self-esteem affect the achievement of students, little attention has been directed to the complex affective and psychological needs of gifted culturally diverse students (Ford, 1992). While Shore and colleagues (1991) maintain that “the self-concepts of bright children are generally not at risk” (p. 223), Grantham and Ford (2003) contend that Black students encounter numerous obstacles that serve as barriers to the development of healthy self-concepts. And these challenges are doubly difficult for Black students who are gifted, for they often experience a heightened sense of justice/injustice, awareness, sensitivity, intuitiveness, and insightfulness.

Social and emotional adjustment. Creative expression in schools has traditionally been based upon White middle class values. If gifted Black students “believe that their creative imagination and the creative products of their culture are not as valuable as the creative products of the dominant culture, they close off part of their ethnic identity . . . thus, impacting their self-esteem” (Kopala, 2000, p. 67).

Ford and Harris (1999) found that gifted elementary children might feel embarrassed and guilty about their academic success. This confusion negatively impacts their peer relationships. For African-American students, alienation and isolation may be more pronounced if they are placed in settings where they compare themselves to White peers and teachers, and are perceived and/or perceive themselves as different. “The academically successful Black student’s life is fraught with conflicts and ambivalence. The fear of being differentiated and labeled . . . often leads to social isolation and a social

self which is hurt by negative perceptions” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 191). Deficit thinking can have its worst effects upon the psyches of culturally diverse students as they internalize the negative perspectives of others (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Whitmore (1986) notes that underachievement in gifted children is based upon their perceptions of their ability to fit in socially, to meet the expectations of parents and teachers, and to achieve in a fashion consistent with others.

Ford (1992) found that African-American students hold contradictory views about achievement. While they have positive values regarding achievement, their actions do not always match. She found that underachievement is impacted by psychological variables more than social and cultural variables (although all forces should be examined, especially for gifted African-American students). Psychological factors that impact achievement include feelings of alienation, rejection, and disconnection from others. Further, gifted children may experience low self-adequacy, isolation, and self-contempt. Rather than acknowledge their innate intellectual abilities, some Black students attribute their academic success to luck, fate, or chance.

Also impacting self-esteem are both isolation and rejection (Kopala, 2000). As previously noted, African-American students tend to be socially oriented and have a strong need to bond with others. This strong desire to belong and affiliate with others can have negative implications if approval is sought from peers who do not value academic achievement (Ford & Harris, 1999; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) or from peers who do not value them.

Branch (1994) suggests that self-esteem is highly contextualized and multifaceted, and that a definitive correlation between racial orientation and self-worth has not been found. However, he maintains that a student's self-efficacy is highly correlated to learning and achievement. Self-efficacy is defined as the attitudes that individuals hold about their capacity to impact outcomes in their lives. Branch suggests that a student's personal identity will have strong implications for the extent of academic success, but group identity, group norms, and peer relationships also should be examined. The significance of external factors and group factors are detailed by Fordham (1988) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986). Fordham and Ogbu suggest that many African-Americans do poorly in school because of inferior schooling, differentiated treatment in schools, job ceilings, and coping strategies that further limit their efforts. Intertwined with these external factors are those issues related to racial identity, which will be addressed in the coming section.

Little has been written about resilience in gifted Black children and teens, although resilience in children, especially those in the inner city, has been a focus of research (Ford, 1994; Kitano, 2003). Resilience appears to be "an acquired response . . . encouraged by a supportive environment" (Kitano, p. 167). Elements found to promote resilience in culturally diverse youth include caring teachers, high standards, effective pedagogy, awareness and sensitivity to diversity, and a curriculum that is multicultural, student centered, and problem based (Kitano). A strong relationship between the school and the home, a healthy self-concept, positive social emotional relations, adaptive

problem solving skills, and a culturally responsive school environment are suggested in order to nurture resilience in gifted Black children and teens (Ford).

Racial identity. For African-American students, racial identity has a considerable influence on school performance, internal motivation, and feelings toward school (Branch, 1994). Over 400 studies have concentrated on racial identity among African-American students, citing its critical role in the psychological well being of African-American students (Ford & Harris, 1999). Perry (2003) suggests that the achievement of African-American students is related to their identity as members of a racial caste group; their identity as members of a cultural group that is both shunned and embraced; their identity as Americans; and their identity, from the perspective of mainstream society, as intellectually inferior.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) maintain that because African-Americans collectively have been shunned and oppressed economically, politically, socially, and psychologically, they have developed a sense of collective identity that is in opposition to the social identity of Whites. In addition to developing this oppositional social identity, African-Americans create ways to protect their identities and to maintain boundaries between themselves and Whites. Thus, African-Americans consider certain behaviors, activities, and attitudes to be characteristic of European Americans and, thus, in opposition to their cultural mores. Not only are these behaviors, activities, and attitudes taboo to many African-Americans, but other behaviors separate from those characteristics of Whites are clearly defined and exhibited. These behaviors are developed and displayed to clearly delineate African-American ways from those of Whites, thus creating an

adequate boundary between the two cultures and developing an oppositional cultural frame of reference.

The oppositional social identity and the oppositional cultural frame of reference impact the educational process for African-American students because, collectively, African-Americans perceive success in school as becoming acculturated into the dominant culture's frame of reference. Even more damaging is the belief that schooling rejects the African-American cultural frame of reference. Thus, "to behave in the manner defined as falling within a White cultural frame of reference is to 'act White' and is negatively sanctioned" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 181). This type of moral judgment, handed down by the collective group to its members, is referred to as "fictive kinship" (p. 184) and symbolizes the strong sense of group membership and group loyalty within the African-American culture. East African theologian, John Mbiti (1990), keenly captures this perspective of collectivism within his "African view of man" (p. 106). "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 106). However, maintaining a positive group standing often drives African-American students into a forced choice; either to be socially accepted or to be academically successful.

To assimilate into the culture of school amounts to a rejection of the Black culture, which is perceived as threat to the survival of the Black community and equates to being rejected by and isolated from peers, who may negatively sanction students and accuse them of acting White. Therefore, to achieve academic success, "Black students must develop a raceless persona" (Fordham, 1988, p. 55) which can be "either a

conscious or unconscious effort on the part of such students to disaffiliate themselves from the fictive kinship system” (pp. 57-58).

For some students, the rejection is too much and their need for acceptance becomes more important than any desire to be academically successful. For other students, they may try to sabotage their performance by dropping out of or refusing to be in gifted programs, by not completing school work, and/or by not exerting any or much effort. Priorities are often reevaluated with peer approval winning out over achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Tatum, 1997). “The burden of acting White becomes heavier when academically able Black students face both pressures from Black peers to conform, and doubts from Whites about their ability” (Fordham & Ogbu, p. 199).

While “acting White” is equated with doing well in school, speaking standard English, being intelligent, dressing and behaving in certain ways, and having White friends, “acting Black” is interpreted as the opposite. Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) found that gifted Black students, both males and females, thought of “acting Black” as lacking intelligence, doing poorly in school, speaking nonstandard English, behaving badly, and adopting a dress code straight out of prison (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007). Only one student in their study (n=166) perceived acting Black as positive, and the vast majority of students indicated that peer pressure contributes to academic underachievement.

According to Rowley and Moore (2002), a dichotomized view of racial identity is too narrow and presumes that a healthy adjustment is almost impossible for gifted

African-American students. They note that a more bicultural view of racial identity suggests that African-American students can maintain strong African-American identities and can perform successfully in predominantly European-American schools, even when these schools contain a large number of African-American classmates who are performing poorly or underachieving in school. Research on the social/emotional health of students with strong bicultural tendencies reveals disparate conclusions. “The complexity in the function of racial identity has not been adequately captured” (Rowley & Moore, ¶2) because policies and interventions often rely on either a dichotomized view of race or a bicultural view of race, both of which can lead to unsophisticated policies and practices. Rowley and Moore call for broader perceptions of racial identity, citing Boykin’s Triple Quandary Theory. Here, Boykin (1986) suggests that African-Americans are part of three cultural realms: the mainstream experience, the Afro-cultural experience, and the oppressed minority experience. To cope with these divergent psychological realities, African-Americans must adopt various strategies such as active resistance, passive resignation, active acceptance, dissemblance, defiance, and so on. The strategies needed to successfully negotiate these three societal domains do not coincide and “require three distinct, largely non-overlapping psychological and behavioral repertoires” (p. 74). For African-Americans, the demands required to be proficient in one realm are enormous and complex, and reduce one’s effectiveness in the other two realms.

Cross’ (1995) model of racial identity describes how Blacks progress and regress through five stages into individuals who are “Afrocentrically aligned” (p. 98). People in Cross’ first stage, pre-encounter, may display a broad range of attitudes from being

neutral about being Black to hating other Blacks and the Black culture. Most Black children in the pre-encounter stage absorb the beliefs and values of the dominant society (Tatum, 1997). In the second stage, Black individuals experience events or encounters, or a series of episodes, which challenge or expand their perceptions, forcing them to alter their worldview, acknowledge their racial status, and face their previous denial. For gifted Black students, this experience may be rejection by White classmates and/or teachers, and may force students to develop a stronger sense of racial identity (Ford, 1996). Individuals in the third stage, the immersion-emersion stage, begin the process of constructing a racial frame of reference, develop a sense of pride, and accept themselves as African-Americans. Black students may glorify their race through strong emotions, risky and/or destructive behaviors, and demonstrations. Central to this stage is the withdrawal from behaviors, activities, and attitudes associated with the dominant culture. The emotionality of the first part of this stage generally leads to an emergence from a simplistic view of Blackness to one that is more substantive and complex. However, some individuals regress to earlier stages, fixate on the emotionality of this stage, or distance themselves from Black issues altogether (Cross). The fourth phase is marked by the integration of a more open and sophisticated racial identity, which includes strong self-acceptance, pride, and acceptance by the Black community. In this stage, Black individuals may embrace a bicultural frame of reference, a multicultural perspective, or a Black nationalistic vantage point. What defines this stage is the balancing and fusion of Blackness with the other aspects of life (such as religion, career, relationships, and so on). Gifted Black students in the stage regard academic achievement in a positive light, and

maintain a balance between being successful in school and being an accepted member of the Black community (Ford). Cross' final stage is denoted by action, as individuals commit themselves to African-American issues and causes. In this final stage, Black students work to bring about changes for Blacks and other culturally diverse groups through organizations, clubs, and other groups concerned with social justice issues (Ford).

Sellers and colleagues (1998) use the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) to detail four dimensions of racial identity in African-American college students: salience, centrality, ideology, and racial pride. They suggest that racial centrality (the extent to which one defines oneself with regard to race) and racial ideology (the meaning that one places on being African-American) are related to college achievement. Racial centrality is positively associated with achievement, while nationalistic and assimilation ideologies are negatively associated with achievement in high centrality students. For students with high centrality, a minority ideology was positively linked with academic success. They suggest that racelessness is not an effective strategy for African-American college students. In fact, ideologies that de-emphasized the significance of race and stressed a connection with the dominant race were associated with poorer achievement. Despite their findings, Sellers and colleagues maintain that racial identity should play a minor role in explaining academic achievement and suggest that other factors (such as innate ability, motivation, and teacher grading) may play a more significant role in school performance. However, they do note that the

relationship between racial centrality and achievement suggests that discussions regarding racial identity should play a major role in interventions with college students.

For gifted Black students, racial identity cannot be examined without the context of the school setting. Many Black students find themselves dealing with one culture at home and another at school (Bonner, 2000). Children in more integrated schools are more aware of racial differences, are more likely to have friends from the ethnic minority group, and tend to like children from differing ethnic backgrounds more than children from predominantly White or predominantly Black schools. African-American students tend to underachieve when in predominantly White schools, and feel more positive about school success when in mixed race schools. Gifted African-American students in predominantly White schools experience the most peer pressure to underachieve and endure the highest social costs when they do achieve (Rowley & Moore, 2002).

Steele (2003) suggests that “the most achievement oriented students, who were also the most skilled, motivated, and confident, were the most impaired by stereotype threat” (p. 120). Stereotype threat is defined as the threat of being seen as fulfilling a negative stereotype. Reactions to stereotype threat span a broad range, and include avoidance, conduct counter to the stereotype, disengagement, and disidentification. Many of these reactions and adaptations are linked to decreased academic performance in African-American students.

African-American students are also confronted with the juxtaposition of being culturally diverse in a society that is extremely race-conscious, while “at the same time engaged in an ongoing but silenced struggle with difference” (Rosenberg, 2004, p. 262).

This silent struggle is not as much a disregard for the value of diverse experiences and perspectives, as a desire to move toward a more equitable, race-neutral society. This model of inclusion, often equated with the term “colorblindness” (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000, p. 242) focuses on the denial of race, and its social implications and realities. Colorblindness was first documented in the 1970’s literature on school desegregation where administrators and teachers in desegregated schools believed that not discussing or recognizing racial issues was the best approach to circumvent racial tensions and discrimination (Revilla, Wells, & Holme, 2004). This strategy has also been documented as a means by which White individuals avoid appearing biased and prejudiced (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008). While short-term benefits of this approach have been documented (Revilla et al.), the general consensus today (Ford & Harris, 1999; Gay, 2001; Markus et al.; Nieto, 1999; Revilla et al.; Schofield, 2001) is that colorblindness has detrimental affects on school policies, curriculum, and the self-concept of individual students.

Thus, the socialization process of African-Americans is marked by a complex combination of experiences, oppressions, and pressures from mainstream society and from the Black community. The intersection of these experiences are illuminated particularly during the educational process if educators are ill equipped to recognize and understand the subtle complexities between what a Black child does or does not do, can or can not do, will or will not do, and should or should not do (Boykin, 1986).

Key Resources and Supports for Gifted African-American Students

“Support systems do not happen by accident, they have to be planned”

(Gallagher, 2002, p. 24). However, gifted students, particularly gifted African-American students, often are left with little support with which to navigate the rough waters of school, home, and neighborhood. Families, school personnel, and communities need to work together to promote, strengthen, and support the affective, psychological, and social development of culturally diverse students (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Specifically, Perry (2003) maintains that the most important thing that parents, professionals, and neighborhoods can do to support gifted African-American students in reaching their potentials is to determine how to develop strong “identities of achievement” (p. 100).

Parental Support

Perry (2003) details the long history of African-Americans’ pursuit of education as a means of physical and psychological freedom. What is needed, she maintains, is a “reenergizing and passing on to the next generation of African-American children the African-American philosophy of education” (p. 101). Clark (1983) studied the lives of successful African-Americans and found five factors in the home environment that contribute to school success. These factors include a positive parent-child relationship, clear and high expectations for behavior and academic achievement, parental involvement in their children’s education, the transmission of hope, and consistency. Ford and Harris (1999) detail five levels of family involvement: providing the basic conditions at home to foster school success, communicating with the school, volunteering at school, monitoring and helping children at home, participating at the school level, and

collaborating with community organizations for the well being of neighborhood children and families.

When encouraged and welcomed, parents can serve as valuable sources of information about their children's gifts and talents, which can be useful in the identification process (Silverstein, 2000). To fully advocate for their children, parents need information about giftedness, programming options, and the policies and practices involved in gifted education (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Silverstein). Parents can help their children by preparing them to deal effectively with racism and other obstacles, by instilling in them a strong sense of pride and identity, and by motivating them to work hard and get ahead (Perry, 2003). Parents can provide stability and support if their children struggle with the challenges of bridging cultures and establishing their own racial identities. Family members can encourage children to embrace academic achievement and help them to see it as complementary to their African-American values, rather than as opposing them. Gifted African-American students need ardent role models who will help them find effective strategies to withstand negative peer pressure, to achieve academically, and to thrive socially (Silverstein).

Hale's (2001) model for culturally appropriate pedagogy features parent volunteers working with students with special needs, reducing the need for whole class instruction, and furthering the teacher's efforts to work with small groups. She suggests that parents be used as tutors and mentors, and notes that "parents need to realize that to a great extent, the future of a child still depends upon the parents" (p. 189).

Professional Support

“Just as gifted education and multicultural education have proceeded along parallel paths, so too has the counseling of gifted students and minority students” (Ford & Harris, 1999, p. 126). While the field of counseling gifted students remains in its infancy, the issue of counseling gifted culturally diverse students is often included in professional discourses in a minimal and obligatory fashion. Counseling “must be made a priority if gifted children who are members of diverse groups are to develop to their potential” (Kopala, 2000, p. 72). To counsel gifted African-American students means to recognize and address their cognitive, academic, affective, psychological, cultural, and social needs, as both individuals who are gifted and as individuals who are African-American. To serve needs as related to giftedness, counselors should address issues of perfectionism, unrealistic goals, emotional intensity, morality, stress, and low achievement. To serve needs related to cultural diversity, counselors should address issues of underachievement, self-concept, social injustice, and racial identity (Ford & Harris).

While teachers and school personnel need to learn about and understand gifted culturally diverse students, culturally diverse students should learn about themselves. Underachieving students may need support when handling peer pressure, developing a positive racial identity, and living as a minority. “We advocate that all culturally diverse students become, at minimum, bicultural in order to work and live – to thrive – in their own culture and mainstream society” (Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004, p. 29).

While Ford and Harris (1999) suggest that the approaches to counseling gifted culturally diverse students are limitless, they note the use of reality therapy, a taxonomy

of educational objectives, and bibliotherapy. Support groups can provide gifted African-American students with peers that are experiencing similar challenges. Culturally diverse students may also benefit from anger management and conflict resolution programs to develop coping skills and resiliency (Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004).

Professional counselors could work with school personnel, family members, and students to address issues related to underachievement; culturally responsive modifications to policies, curriculum, and pedagogy; social injustice and discrimination; and self-concept and racial identity. These issues should be addressed early and consistently. Interventions with school personnel might include staff development and ongoing consultation to sensitize staff to appreciate, recognize, and apply policies and practices that are culturally responsive (Kopala, 2000). Additionally, staff should receive professional support in restructuring curricular content, learning environments, the teaching/learning process, and student products to include multicultural content and to better respond to cultural diversity (Banks, 2003).

Educators can empower parents in their efforts to support their children by providing them with information, skills, and resources “to maintain their position as knowing adults” (Kirschenbaum, 1991, p. 44). This allows parents to work collaboratively with teachers and other school personnel, to be informed decision makers, and to ensure that educational interventions are congruent with the family’s values. A positive parent-school relationship is critical for gifted students because it demonstrates the parent’s respect for education and the school’s respect for the values of each family (Silverstein, 2000).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) maintain that schools should understand the impact of the fictive kinship system on student perceptions of learning, traditional academic values, and expected behaviors. Schools should develop programs and offer counseling to help students separate academic achievement from the dominant cultural frame of reference. Along with other community-based organizations, schools should create a climate in which biculturalism, bilingualism (standard and nonstandard English), and Black culture (modern and classic) are normalized. Further, these should be presented as complementary, rather than oppositional, to the dominant society (Perry, 2003).

Schools can support African-American students academically by creating school communities that specifically focus on high levels of achievement for all students. Beyond the academic day, schools can offer group activities that are intellectual in nature and affirm that being Black is synonymous with being engaged, bright, and academically successful. To be effective, these activities should have established protocols, emphasize practice skills (such as persistence, commitment, and thoroughness) necessary for success, and include culturally responsive elements (Perry, 2003). Schools, working in conjunction with parents and communities, can develop review processes that help administrators assess how their schools are doing in ridding themselves of deficit thinking, racism, and other policies and practices - both subtle and obvious - that limit and defeat students. These review processes can also be used to help schools create strategies and procedures that build and sustain identities of achievement.

Community Support

“Apparently, Black children’s general perception that academic pursuit is ‘acting White’ is learned in the Black community” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 203). Thus, along with the school, the African-American community, through its families, community-based programs, and churches, has a role to play in dispelling the attitude that achievement leads to acculturation into a White frame of reference (Branch, 1994; Fordham & Ogbu; Perry, 2003). The African-American community should examine its own view and articulation of learning, achievement, and success. Through public recognition, the community can make clear to its young people that the community values and supports academic effort and achievement. Perry also calls on community-based organizations to create a parallel system of schools for African-Americans to deliver supplemental academic instruction, the African-American philosophy of education, and African-American studies. Hale (2001) proposes a model featuring community members as classroom volunteers and churches that adopt schools. Another feature of her model is the creation of *in loco parentis* committees, one per classroom, to meet and review the progress of each child and to ensure that no child falls through the cracks. Committee members could include the classroom teacher, a community member, and a parent representative. Cultural enrichment is built into Hale’s model to complement the instructional efforts of the school. These extra curricular and cocurricular activities would be provided through community partners such as churches, businesses, the YMCA/YWCA, and other civic organizations. She calls on churches, especially, to provide character education, religious grounding, and cultural education.

Mentors and role models provide key support in the academic and affective lives of gifted culturally diverse students (Hale, 2001; Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004; Ford & Harris, 1999; Torrance et al., 1998). However, Branch (1994) contends that “the presence of role models is not likely to significantly impact a child’s view of self and his/her ability to accomplish new goals if children don’t see themselves as competent and capable of aspiring to what the role model has attained” (p. 219). Changing the opportunities available to African-Americans will ultimately change the behaviors and expectations of African-American young people. “Until the perceptions of the . . . opportunity structure change, the response of Black students in the school context is likely to continue to be one which suggests that school achievement is a kind of risk” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 203).

Impact of Gifted Programming on African-American Students

Clearly, gifted African-American students face enormous external and internal challenges that create an orientation against achievement. To help students stand up to the social pressures will require support systems that currently are not in place for all gifted African-American students. For those African-American students who have participated in gifted programs, the impact of these programs can be seen by examining the perceived costs, benefits, and coping strategies.

In Hertzog’s (2003) study, participants had negative feelings about being separated from classmates with similar backgrounds and felt that they had to develop friendships exclusively with peers in their gifted programs and/or classes. In several other studies (Harmon, 2002; Horvat & Antonio, 1999), all of the participants were distanced

and marginalized physically, socially, emotionally, and organizationally by and from the school. These students, too, were forced to restrict their friendships. In these instances, they were isolated from the larger student body and had to find friends among their ethnic group.

In the Horvat and Antonio (1999) study, high school participants described how they had to consciously change who they were to survive in the school environment. Participants mentioned that they had to change the way they spoke, listen to different kinds of music, and surrender their racial identity and pride. The college admissions process brought additional anguish, as participants were made to feel that they were admitted to prestigious colleges only because they were Black and that they filled spots that their White classmates were seeking.

Although each participant “paid a price” (Horvat & Antonio, 1999, p. 336), each felt that they experienced benefits which were perceived as outweighing any negative impacts (Hertzog, 2003; Horvat & Antonio). Perceived benefits included better preparation for college; better study, time management, and organizational skills; development of solid work ethics; and preparation for future careers (Hertzog). Participants learned to cope with life in a society that is predominantly White. Each took away “a tool kit of habits, skills, and styles” (Horvat & Antonio, p. 337) with which to construct their futures, attain a high quality education, and gain entrance into a top tier college. The development of self-esteem, through the accomplishment of difficult tasks, was also noted as a positive outcome of being in gifted programs and/or classes (Horvat & Antonio).

In Harmon's (2002) study, culturally diverse students who were bussed to a predominantly European-American school experienced unchecked abuse that produced anxiety, anger, and apprehension. They expressed confusion regarding this insensitive and prejudicial treatment, and the lack of intervention by school related adults. As a result, these students refused to attend highly academic magnet programs, although they all qualified. "Although the magnet programs provided the academic challenge they were seeking, they were concerned about the kind of teachers, the lack of an inclusive curriculum, and teaching methods they believed a predominantly White education program provided" (¶47).

In Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) study of a predominantly African-American high school, gifted students described the various strategies that they employed to cope with the tension between wanting to do well academically and conforming to the group sanctioned expectations. Underachieving students simply avoided the conflict by putting little time and effort into their schoolwork. They expressed fear at being perceived as "brainiacs" (p. 186) by their peers, which equated to losing their group status and suffering ridicule and isolation. Some students played roles where they maintained their social standing, while downplaying or hiding their intellectual abilities. Some students lost interest in school upon realizing that their future opportunities were limited, and achievement and advancement would make them overqualified for low-level jobs.

High achieving students in the Fordham and Ogbu (1986) study adopted strategies where they could cover their success in activities that minimized the hostility toward them. One such strategy was "lunching" (p. 194) where a student might present

him/herself as a class clown or as acting crazy. Another socially acceptable cover was athletic prowess. While most academically successful students pretended to put forth little effort in order to maintain their social standing, others used their talents to help less able friends who would protect them. Students who earned good grades, but put forth little effort, were often seen as lucky or having natural talent. Most academically successful students in this study admitted to restraining their true abilities in order to fit in with peers.

Chapter Summary

As reflected in the literature presented, gifted African-American students face enormous challenges being identified and included in gifted programming, having access to culturally responsive teachers, and receiving quality gifted programming that is qualitatively different from that offered in general education. Those African-American students who have participated in gifted programming note personal benefits, but also overwhelming costs. This is not surprising given that these students often find themselves without well-planned and efficient support systems encompassing families, school personnel, and communities working together to promote and strengthen the academic and affective advancement of these talented young people.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Qualitative Research

Research Method

This study focuses on African-American students who participated in fulltime gifted programming and their perspectives on the impact of this educational experience. To reveal such personal perspectives, Callahan (1992) proposes “qualitative methods . . . to determine what works for which individuals under which conditions, what the other intervening factors are that influence success, and how the program deals with those factors” (p. 121). Qualitative methods tend to explore personal issues with an emphasis on the meanings that people place on the experiences in their lives and how these meanings connect to the greater world around them. Researchers (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) define this as a naturalistic approach where experiences are studied in their natural settings, “attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 3). The field of education is among many in the humanities and social sciences that are using narrative studies as a way to understand the personal identity and everyday world of the narrator (Yow, 2005).

Research Design

To draw out these personal experiences and the significance given to them by this study's participants, I make use of two methodologies: oral history, and educational criticism and connoisseurship. Oral history is the recording of a personal narrative produced during an in-depth, open-ended interview. These testimonies are recorded and then typed verbatim. Transcripts are generally available for research, reinterpretation, and corroboration (Ritchie, 2003). Because the oral historian does not adhere to a hard fast set of questions, he or she is open to observing the participant's choice of topics and discovering what might not have been considered previously. Oral histories reveal the unwritten rules of personal relationships that characterize groups and communities; the meanings of artifacts, images, and symbols of which people make use; and the psychological reality that underlies the ideals and actions of individuals (Yow, 2005). Oral history is intended "to ask the questions that have not been asked and to collect the reminiscences that otherwise would be lost" (Ritchie, p. 46). Thus, this methodology is often used to gain insight into the experiences of marginalized populations and the meanings that they ascribe to the events in their lives. "One precise advantage of oral evidence is that it is iterative and one is not left alone . . . to divine its significance; the 'source' can reflect upon the content and offer interpretation as well as facts" (Yow, p.9).

Within the process of oral history interviewing, both the interviewer and the participant are seen as having knowledge of the situation or topic. The interviewer brings knowledge based upon research in a particular discipline, while the participant brings intimate knowledge based upon first hand experience and a personal perspective (Yow,

2005). Further, by saying or implying “No one can speak your story better than you” (Charles T. Morrissey, oral history workshop, December 12, 2005), interviewers move participants from a passive role to an active, meaningful status, inviting participants to share control of the interview and, ultimately, its underlying power structure.

While oral history methods document the significance that people assign to the events and experiences in their lives, educational criticism and connoisseurship presents a scaffold within which to describe, interpret, and evaluate such educational events and settings. Further, this methodology allows those interested to examine and discuss relevant themes that emerge from the process. Educational criticism and connoisseurship was developed by Elliott Eisner to improve “educational practice by giving us a fuller, more complex understanding of what makes schools and classrooms tick” (Eisner, 1998, p. 8). Connoisseurship, as a process, is the art of appreciation. While the word *appreciation* is often used to denote a positive reaction or approval, Eisner uses the term connoisseurship to connote “the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest” (p. 68). Because connoisseurship is a private act, a means of disclosure is necessary.

Educational criticism is used “to transform the qualities of . . . a classroom or school, or act of teaching and learning into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities that have been experienced” (Eisner, 1998, p. 86). The four dimensions of educational criticism (description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics) provide a structure with which to organize the observations, perceptions, and

criticisms. Rich descriptive text paints a picture of what has been experienced in private and makes the qualities public. Interpretation uses ideas, concepts, and theories to account for and explain the events and their possible consequences (Eisner, 2002). Evaluation, an extension of interpretation, is the complex process of determining the educational value of the educational experiences. Finally, recurring themes are identified that are distillations of what has been experienced and might possibly be transferred to similar situations. “The theme, embedded in the particular situation, extends beyond the situation itself” (Eisner, 1998, p. 103) through naturalistic generalization, rather than the formal generalization found in empirical studies.

Data Collection

Participants. In this study, a purposeful, nonrandom sample was used. Participants were selected by ethnic group (African-American) and gender (two males and two females). I sought participants who were at least 16 years of age, capable of abstract and deductive reasoning according to Piaget’s (1932) stages of cognitive development, thus old enough to reflect upon their experiences in gifted education. In Piaget’s formal operations stage, ages 11 and above, children and adolescents are able to make rational judgments, consider possibilities from several perspectives, and are able to think about their own thinking (Bukatko & Daehler, 1995).

Each adolescent selected for this study had been enrolled in full time gifted programming during at least five years of elementary school and/or three years of middle school. Another determining factor was the respondents’ willingness to discuss their educational experiences in open ended, digitally recorded interviews.

One potential participant, a former student of mine, was contacted personally during a pilot study. Another was secured through the administration of a local school for gifted students. A colleague, whose son had attended a gifted and talented program, recommended a classmate of his. The final young man was referred to me from a public school system, whose administration had been contacted for assistance. At the time of the interviews, one of these young people was a junior in high school, another was a senior in high school, one had just graduated from high school, and the last individual was a freshman in college.

An additional student who attended a public gifted and talented program was located through a fellow graduate student. When contacted, this young man expressed an interest and willingness to be involved in the study. The first interview was conducted at his home. I contacted him to schedule the second interview, but had trouble securing a mutually agreed upon date. He assured me, as did his father, that he was interested in participating in the second interview, but after numerous unreturned phone calls, I presumed that he was either too busy or not interested. He was dropped from the study, and his narrative was not used.

The interviews spanned the course of a year because of the challenge in locating participants, especially males, who fit the participant parameters. This appeared to be a result of the under-identification of African-Americans as gifted, as well as the peer pressure for African-Americans to disengage with those characteristics affiliated with the dominant culture, such as academic success.

Although these individuals were chosen by ethnic group and gender, they represent varied personal backgrounds. One participant lived with his mother with no contact with his father. Another individual lived with her mother, and had some contact with her father who lived across the country with a “new” family. The third participant grew up with both parents, although they were divorced while she was in elementary school. Finally, the last individual in the study grew up in a two-parent household. These families also encompassed diverse socioeconomic levels.

While discussing the interview process with these participants and their parents, I assured them that participant responses would not be shared with parents, former or current teachers, or other study participants. Each participant was asked to pick a pseudonym to protect his/her confidentiality.

Interview process. In order to capture each participant’s firsthand experiences in gifted education as an African-American, I asked each young person to share his or her story in two interviews. Although the interviews were originally scheduled for 45 – 60 minutes, several participants used this forum to delve deeper or to digress to other related topics, and some interviews lasted up to three hours. I accepted these digressions with a constant and respectful eye to my participants’ schedules and other commitments. Forays into topics such college plans encouraged these young people to take on an even greater role in the interview process, allowing me to garner a deeper awareness and understanding of what was significant to each individual.

Interviews were held at locations decided upon by participants. These included participants’ homes, a coffee shop, and a college dorm lobby. Although some locations

were not ideal, each presented the participant with control over that aspect of the interview process. With participant permission, each interview was digitally recorded. An interview guide (see Appendix D) was used to guide the interview process during both sessions. Follow-up questions were framed based upon answers that each interviewee provided. Additional questions were crafted after the first interview in order to fully explore all areas of inquiry during the second interview. Also during that second interview, each participant was encouraged to speak freely about any related topics that might have come to mind. With all participants, discussions continued after the digital recorder player was turned off, and in cases where the dialogue was relevant, I took notes.

The digital interviews were transcribed as closely to the recorded dialogue as possible. Each interviewee reviewed the interview transcriptions, and three of the four participants emailed acknowledgements that transcripts were received, read, and approved. The fourth individual thoroughly reviewed his interview transcripts, emailing me both transcripts complete with revisions and comments.

Data Analysis and Presentation

“Analysis . . . follows standard procedures for observing, measuring and communicating with others about the nature of what is ‘there,’ the reality of the everyday world” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 33). Using educational criticism and connoisseurship provides such procedures; a framework through which to describe, interpret, and evaluate the educational experiences of participants.

Although data analysis occurred throughout the interview process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), the heart of the process began as I read each transcribed interview and penciled in preliminary labels near passages that held significance in the context of the participant's story. Initially, these descriptive codes were based upon the framework underlying this study's literature review and research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I combined the two transcripts for each participant, and as I read and reread them, I added deeper and more interpretive codes. In some cases, I revised or eliminated codes. A word processor was used to annotate the margin of the narrative text with appropriate codes. I noted that excerpts from different participant's stories connected to passages from other participants and to related literature, and I saw patterns begin to emerge. Some excerpts were contradictory and seemed inconsistent with the others. I flagged these for further scrutiny. Eventually, I finalized the codes (see Appendix E) and used them to seek connections, build interpretative categories, note relationships and exceptions, and extract quotes.

These quotes form the foundation of descriptive participant profiles, offered in Chapter Four and intended to identify and characterize the qualities of gifted programming as seen through the eyes of this study's participants. Offering verbatim passages is appropriate because "staying close to the data is the most powerful means of telling the story" (Janesick, 2000, p. 389). These evocative portraits are designed to enable readers to partake vicariously in the participants' educational experiences and understand the details of these experiences from their perspectives. They present the four participants and their experiences in the context of their gifted programs, their families

and communities, and influential social and psychological factors. Woven throughout are issues of culture. This organizational structure is adapted from the work of Dr. Donna Ford who uses these concentric rings of influence to examine issues of underachievement in gifted Black students (Ford, 1996; Ford & Whiting, 2008).

According to Eisner (1998), interpretation can be thought of as explaining the meaning of participants' experiences. Straight description "is almost never adequate without interpretation, if the effort is to understand the import of events or situations for people" (p. 97). Wolcott (2001) suggests that our interpretations reflect the complexity of human behavior rather than attempt to infer absolute meanings. Evaluation is the act of appraising what works and what does not work in the educational setting. Eisner suggests that this task is "complex, subtle, and context specific" (p. 100) and cannot be completed without the use of value judgments to determine the educational value of what has been described. Thus, to interpret and evaluate the narrative data, I draw upon current and related literature, using it as a lens through which to explore theories that provide connections and order to these profiles, and determine the significance of the participants' educational experiences. In Chapter 5, I examine the first three research questions through a more extensive interpretation of the data. From this analysis, distilled themes emerge and are analyzed. Finally, by answering the final research question and examining the implications of the data, recommendations are offered that present ways in which the findings of this study might affect gifted education, as it relates to the identification and education of gifted African-American students.

Researcher's Role

The paradigm of qualitative research assumes the researcher to be an important and integral part of the research process. “The researcher can’t separate himself or herself from the topic or people he or she is studying. It is in the interaction between the researcher and the researched that the knowledge is created” (Mehra, 2002, ¶32). Thus, researchers should have an awareness of “the personal qualities that have been activated during their research . . . [and] disclose to their readers where self and subject became joined” (Peshkin, 1991, p. 286).

I first became joined to gifted students while teaching in a public school in an outer ring suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Upon moving to Denver, Colorado, I worked at two private schools for gifted children for a total of 17 years. During these years in gifted education, I noted and considered the nature and needs of gifted students and twice-exceptional students, and individualized for their unique needs. Ironically, while I advocated for the specialized needs of these students, I was naïve about the needs of gifted culturally diverse students. While I served their needs as gifted students, I was sorely unaware of their needs as culturally diverse learners. Ford and Milner (2005) suggest that overlooking cultural diversity yields results as grievous, and perhaps more, than disregarding giftedness. I was unaware of this until I began teaching at a charter school where the majority of my students were from at-risk environments, and 95% of the families were African-American. My experiences in this predominantly Black setting, and my current experience at a culturally diverse magnet school for gifted students, have taught me to move beyond my colorblind and politically correct upbringing and to push

past the contributions and additive levels of Banks' (2001, 2003) multicultural education framework. Thus, the intersection of the fields of culturally responsive practices, multiculturalism, and giftedness, as well as numerous questions about Black learners, led to the development of this investigative study.

Subjectivity

Peshkin (1991) maintains that researchers should be highly aware of their subjectivity and remain cognizant of its possible impact throughout the course of their research. He compares subjectivity to an article of clothing that cannot be removed and characterizes it as the union of perspectives emanating from one's class, status, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and values. He notes that we each have many subjective interdependent selves and they are exposed depending upon the situations in which we find ourselves. He advocates for "the enhanced awareness that can result from a formal, systematic monitoring of self" (p. 294). Examining Peshkin's framework allowed for my own systematic, reflective monitoring of my selves.

Ethnic maintenance self. My Jewish heritage has prompted me to experience and understand both cultural persecution and personal discrimination. While my experiences remain significantly different from those of African-Americans, I maintained a sensitivity and respect regarding the need for maintaining ethnic communities. Because my heritage stresses the need to preserve my culture while assimilating into the broader society, I have some insight into being a part of two, sometimes differing, worlds.

Community building/seeking self. Given that community is important to me from an ethnic perspective, it is not surprising that I have always fostered a strong sense

community in my classroom. Because I value community and relationships in my personal and professional lives, I remained cognizant of messages from any participants who might not have sought such strong camaraderie with others and might have favored more independence and autonomy.

Justice seeking self. Having been the victim of religious discrimination and having been witness to the prejudice that my Black students experienced, I remained vigilant and aware of visceral responses to similar experiences that my participants might have had and I monitored their effects upon my data collection and analysis.

Transformative self. The transformative self, one I wish to add, is best described by Nieto (1999) in her discussion of multicultural learning communities:

Environments that are both critical and empowering are . . . developed and sustained through the relationships formed in classrooms, between and among teachers, students, and families. Building these relationships implies a profound transformation of the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of teachers concerning the nature of learning and intelligence, the role of diversity in learning, and, in fact, the ideological stance or worldview they may have in general. The transformation . . . begins as a political commitment on the part of teachers. (p. 131)

Through the deep relationships formed at the charter school, I continued to confront my racial identity, while becoming a more culturally responsive teacher, and viewing teaching as a political commitment. Although my emergent transformation has altered my worldview, my participants and their stories remained center stage. While it was tempting to advocate for, identify with, and/or defend these remarkable young people, my responsibility as a researcher did not include these roles. Instead, I kept my participants' best interests in mind, while providing them the opportunity to chronicle their own stories.

Racial/ethnic self. Nieto (1999) asserts that teachers from the dominant culture “first need to understand and accept their own diversity and delve into their own identities before they can learn about and from their [culturally diverse] students” (p. 133). I contend that the same could be said about researchers and their participants. Andersen (1993) suggests that researchers, such as myself, can use the tensions in our cultural identities to better see varying perspectives in participants’ experiences and to critically examine our belief systems. Thus, I brought an awareness and attentiveness to my cultural power, biases, and assumptions. I was also cognizant and sensitive to the uses and abuses of my role in the interviewer/interviewee relationship. To this end, I asked participants to select the interview date, time, and location. In addition, the young people in this study were encouraged to read their transcripts, as well as their profiles, and make any changes and/or clarifications that they felt necessary.

While the race of the researcher is likely to have an effect on the way a participant responds, researchers can not assume that the difference in response means that one response is more accurate or more genuine than another (Rhodes, 1994). While I acknowledge that I do not have complete access to the African-American experience, my participants readily shared their experiences and feelings. Each seemed to discuss sensitive topics openly, and candid remarks revealed that they responded in an honest and open fashion.

When considering the most appropriate research methodology for this study, I selected oral history interviews in order to give voice to “the experiences and perspectives of . . . people who might otherwise have been ‘hidden from history’” (Perks

& Thomson, 1998, p. ix). Boushel (2000) emphasizes that researchers should bestow as much significance to the participants' stories as to the descriptions and explanations of professionals. Although I bring background knowledge about gifted Black students to this study, I did not view myself as the ultimate authority regarding the lives of my participants, or the lives of Black students.

Andersen (1993) suggests that researchers should acknowledge that the impact of their cultural filters might influence the interpretation and analysis of their data. During the data analysis phase of this study, I was ever aware of my personal selves and attempted to balance my perspective so that I was neither affecting the study nor allowing the study to affect me (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By using extended excerpts of my participants' stories, I herein present the participants' experiences with deference, insisting that their voices be heard and documented.

The impact of race in research is multifaceted and complex, and needs to be addressed in an honest and forthright manner. With "a genuine interest in the stories of others . . . [researchers] can go a long way toward bridging racial and ethnic barriers" (Seidman, 2006, p. 100). As a researcher of good will from a different ethnic background than my participants, I have endeavored to acknowledge the cross-racial challenges, to examine my personal biases and assumptions, and to maintain an ongoing sensitivity to my participants, their experiences, and their feelings. I have worked hard to validate and accurately represent their educational experiences through their voices.

Non-researcher self. Peshkin (1991) warns of the non-researcher self, where affection may soften the researcher's perspective. In the early stages of my research, I

began teaching in a school district attended by one of the study's participants. Years prior to the study, I taught one of the participants, and I was a teacher at two of the schools attended by participants. Although I was vigilant to keep these unique connection from clouding my judgment as a researcher, I did use my insider status to my advantage.

"Knowing the history of the situation, something about the teacher and the school, and the values that are regarded as important in the community can help us to notice and to interpret what we have noticed" (Eisner, 1998, p. 66). I did use my intimate knowledge of gifted education, and of two of the schools, in particular, to ask deeper, and more specific and significant follow up questions. Eisner warns "a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing" (p. 67). To my surprise, I was able to see my former student, my previous work environments, and gifted education from fresh and novel perspectives.

Connoisseurship

"Classrooms are probably one of the most complex subjects of connoisseurship. Our perception and interpretation of events are influenced by a wide range of knowledge we believe to be germane to that classroom or situation" (Eisner, 1998, p. 66).

Educational connoisseurs are able to perceive subtleties, to be students of human behavior, and to focus their perceptions on what is significant about even the most inconspicuous events in the classroom (Eisner, 2002).

To assert a level of connoisseurship necessary to grasp and convey the experiences of gifted African-American students, I offer my 33 years as an educator within rural, suburban, and urban settings, including public, private, magnet, and charter schools. I have served gifted students for 20 years through various delivery models; pull

out programs, cluster classrooms, push in models (specialist serves gifted students in general classroom) and all-day self-contained classrooms. Beyond an expertise in gifted education, I have insight and knowledge of special education and twice exceptionalities. I have taught African-American students exclusively for two years and am familiar with the literature on African-American learners, gifted education, multicultural education, multicultural gifted education, urban education, and culturally responsive teaching. I have viewed education from beyond the teacher's desk through the lens of a federal Chapter 1 technical assistance provider, an educational researcher, an author and product developer, a staff development presenter, and a graduate student. Eisner (2002) maintains that the number of years spent in a classroom does not indicate the level of connoisseurship, but notes that the combination of classroom experience and discernment does constitute connoisseurship. I concur, and am firm in my belief that I have continually attempted to hone my skills as a student of my students. Through the accrual of diverse experiences, I continue to reflect upon my practice, adjust my perceptions and beliefs, and expand the range of my expertise.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative inquiry into the experiences of those students who are both Black and gifted draws upon the methodologies of both oral history and educational criticism and connoisseurship. Oral history has traditionally been used to gain insight into populations that have been marginalized, while the process of educational criticism and connoisseurship was developed to improve school settings. Together, these

methodologies serve to shape and guide this study, which is designed to advance the education of gifted African-American youth.

The four young people interviewed for this study, whose stories are described in the next chapter, were enrolled in gifted schools or programs between three and ten years. Through their stories, personal meanings have been extrapolated, appraisals of their educational experiences have been presented, and emergent themes are discussed. Throughout this process, I have remained cognizant of my role and subjectivity as a White researcher studying and presenting Black perspectives and issues.

Chapter Four: Participant Profiles

Introduction

In this chapter, I present descriptive portraits of the four adolescents who participated in this study. These profiles include the personal memories and unique insights as each young person described and reflected upon his/her personal journey through gifted education, viewing these experiences from two intertwined vantage points; one as an intellectually able individual and the other as a Black child and, then, teen. These personal portraits are a testament to each of his or her unique experiences; how each of these young people was influenced by the school environment; family and community; culture; and social and psychological factors, how each negotiated and coped with adversity, and how each sought a level of personal balance and social acceptance.

Vanderbilt researcher Donna Ford suggests that these rings of influence (1996) be used to examine factors that impact achievement, especially underachievement, in gifted African-American students. The rings of influence (school, family and community, and social and psychological factors) will serve as a lens through which to view each participant's personal story. As these stories unfold, the impact of culture is interwoven throughout and will be addressed within each section.

Shandra

School

For all of her elementary and middle school years, Shandra attended a private school that served gifted early childhood students through those in eighth grade. When asked what she remembered about her gifted education experience, Shandra noted, “I remember all of my teachers.” Since Shandra attended the school for ten years, she was able to recall teachers who came and went, and teachers who remained for extended years of service. She was especially struck by the appearance of a Black teacher on staff. “I remember the first Black teacher . . . I remember her there and then she worked with [one of the teachers], but for some reason she left, but I had never seen Black teachers before.” Although she spoke of several favorite teachers, Shandra maintained, “all my teachers . . . were good. I liked all of them.” Shandra saw her teachers as “different” and “like your friends” and developing a close personal relationship with teachers was important to her, although it wasn’t always reciprocated.

I think with a lot of my teachers I had an individual relationship with all of them because I myself took the time to get to know them. Now that I look back on it, I think I did that because I didn’t think that they should just be teaching me stuff. I felt like I should get to know them and know where they’re coming from, and . . . know what this person is all about.

Shandra took the time to get to know her teachers and allowed them to get to know her, especially in the primary grades, but “kind of stopped” during her intermediate years. “They weren’t those type of teachers. They’re here to teach me and I’m not here to really be friends with them.” She felt that they “came off to me as kind of cold” and “didn’t really let me into their world outside of the teacher-student relationship.” During

those intermediate grades, she remained in contact with her prior teachers. When teachers left the school, she felt that she had lost someone that she had come to know quite personally. She cried recalling those feeling of loss.

But I didn't like it when they would leave. It's just emotional . . . I don't know. Your teachers are there with you and you really do develop something. I know things in their life might change, but sometimes, maybe they'll understand how big of a bond you did have.

Beyond her bonds with teachers, Shandra recalled numerous specific projects, units of study, class sleepovers, building changes, plays, field trips, and friends. "I just remember it being really creative, anything we did."

Other memories, that were not as positive, involved the lack of cultural diversity in her school. "I was somewhat aware that I was like the only Black kid there. I felt like I was just like the dot on a piece of white paper." Juxtaposed against the perception of being the only Black student in the school were vivid memories of "every Black kid that passed through there."

During her interview, Shandra vocalized a poignant memory that also provides additional insight into her feelings as being one of the few Black students in a predominantly White school.

Every year, I'd look on the class list, we'd get a class list. I always wanted to make sure some of my friends are in my class, you know, and I'd look for somewhat of an ethnic name, you know, like is it there? And I'd walk into class, and I was still the only Black kid there, and so yeah, that's interesting because I didn't think about that before. Class lists [are] a big memory, that I had to see who was new and what were they all about.

Having classmates that looked like her was significant for Shandra to satisfy a natural need for group affiliation. "I felt like I wasn't alone anymore. Like it was never a problem for me to be like the only Black kid, but I just felt like I was [her emphasis] the

only one.” She expressed her hope that other culturally diverse students would attend the school. “I thought that, okay, if they come, then maybe more are going to start coming and stuff like that.”

Beyond the perception of being diverse racially, socioeconomic level played a role in Shandra’s perceptions of being different, as well.

I felt like my lifestyle was a lot different than the kids I had there. I felt that no one shared my lifestyle. And so, when I would be going through something, I’d be like, “Well, who can I share that with?” Like no one really understands that. Honestly, when I say that, I’m not saying, like, I was poor, but a lot of the kids at [the school] were well off or came from well off families and didn’t really have to struggle, and I didn’t really understand like if we were struggling or what not. But I definitely realized I didn’t have everything that they had, and so that’s when I came on like, “Who else goes through this?”

Shandra detailed how relating to friends with similar lifestyles was important. “Everyone would invite me to their house, but after seeing their houses, I didn’t want anybody to come to my house.” She gravitated towards Black and biracial students, although there were years “when there’s nobody. It was gappy, not only at the beginning of each year, but there was years when there was nobody.”

When asked if being a racial minority in a primarily White school was the only reason Shandra used the term “toughed it out” to describe her years at the school, she recalled feelings of academic inferiority.

For some reason I do remember feeling like I wasn’t as smart as some of these kids. I think during those times, I was looking at the value I thought they had, that with where they were coming from, that they would be smarter than I was. I definitely thought that maybe I wasn’t as smart as them because I didn’t come from where they came from. And so . . . a lot of the time, I would see the reactions of the teachers with their work, when it started getting to intellectual work. I remember seeing the teacher’s response with them and then seeing it with me. I always felt like maybe I was at the bottom of the class.

Shandra recalled experiencing minor challenges transitioning to the differing cultural styles of her elementary and middle school teachers, especially when it came to calling out spontaneously and her emotional expressiveness. “My teachers . . . were always telling me to be quiet. Like lower . . . use my inside voice. I thought I was using my inside voice and ‘til this day I still kind of have that going on.” Shandra was a strong communal learner, but remembered that she and friends were split up throughout her elementary years. During her ten years at the school, Shandra also learned that her optimal learning style involved both listening and writing. “When I do want to learn and make sure I register something in my mind, I make sure I pay attention with eyes, ears, and notes.”

Fortunately for Shandra, the school catered to differing learning preference and styles. “When we got a project, it would be an overall subject but they’d have different types of projects. There could be a writing assignment or there’d be an art assignment that you could choose from.” The school also provided numerous opportunities for students to express themselves through the arts. Shandra realized early on that she was talented artistically and connected with “anything that involves acting, free writing . . . when I can talk however I want to talk, and art projects. I definitely knew that, artistically, I was able to express myself better.” Shandra found acting a natural outlet, so much so that she currently plans to pursue acting as a career.

I got like a lot of the lead roles for . . . even when I was younger in my classes. I got a lot of lead roles in our mini plays. I remember them seeing that quality in me as a good actress. A good someone to deliver overall the role that they wanted and they saw that I was strong and what not.

When Shandra was asked whether attending a predominantly White school was worth it, she was emphatic that it was. “I was always positive towards school. I love to learn. I always looked at school as a place to fill my brain with more and more things. I never thought of school negatively.” She felt that this experience taught her how to adapt to new situations and experiences, especially those that placed her in contact with White adults. Attending a school that was primarily White taught her that people were not going to judge her automatically.

When I’m in situations . . . with other White people, usually . . . White adults, I’ve learned how to, not necessarily . . . be a chameleon . . . I just know what to do. It’s just comfortable for me. I’m not shy at all.

Shandra also noted that she was very appreciative of the educational foundation that she received. She felt that the school provided her “a great education” and prepared her for high school “over and above,” especially in mathematics. In fact, she suggested, “They prepared me pretty much for college, at an eighth grade level, which is really good.” Once in high school, she took some regular track classes, which further made her “appreciative of being challenged 24/7 in a gifted program.”

“I’ll definitely take more social things that I learned from [the school] to college.” Socially, Shandra learned to make friends and be open to others. Many of her close friends were of a faith different from her own, and this experience opened her eyes to new perspectives and beliefs. She took advantage of being Black in a predominantly White school. “Being myself and standing out, even though it was like obvious that I would stand out, I still . . . made something to it. I wasn’t just the Black girl. I was the Black girl that acted.”

Shandra pondered what she would change about the school if she could. “I don’t know what I would change because even though there’s like ups and downs, it made me who I am, like, you know. The experiences made me who I am instead of trying to change something.”

When we met for the second interview, Shandra remarked that our first meeting had rekindled strong feelings and memories about the school.

Ever since the last interview, I have just been having like sparks of [school] memories. I am kind of forgetting them but I mean, things which remind me of them but it just made me, since the last interview, just made me remember [the school] more and trying to hold on to those memories. [The school] is just like an important, important part of my life. And then also the last interview made me realize how passionate I am about my education and how I wish that everyone could have my education and I wish everyone could have that drive.

Family and Community

Shandra was raised by her mother, while her father lived on the east coast, involved in her life only on significant occasions. Both of her parents attended a private college where her mother held an advanced degree; her father earned a Bachelor’s degree, and started (but did not complete) his Master’s degree. Both of Shandra’s maternal grandparents were college educated, as well. At the time of the interviews, Shandra’s older brother was a senior at a historically Black college.

When Shandra was asked from where she gathered her inner strength to tackle the challenges of attending a school with primarily White classmates, she was quick to cite her mother as the source.

She just always told me that I was different and it’s okay to be different and be strong and be who I was. She never said, “Okay, it’s okay to be Black,” but, you know, just being myself and then being in that school, you know, being Black.

She especially appreciated her mother since she was a single mother. “I started to realize all these single moms and what they really have to do.” After Shandra’s eleven-year-old sister passed away (when Shandra was 10), she recalled the grief that overcame her. “I was like, I’m feeling this. My mom must feel ten times what I’m feeling.”

Shandra did not perceive her family as having high expectations for her, but rather as helping her to nurture her gifts and talents. “I don’t see it as high expectations, that they’re expecting something of me. They just . . . support whatever I do, even if I think I didn’t do something very well, they still think of it as good.” Her mother encouraged Shandra to recognize that letter grades “don’t reflect who you are.” Shandra was taught to embrace learning, and to appreciate and apply what was learned. Shandra acknowledged that going to college was the norm in her family and that she had internalized that value, although she felt that “being in school all my life, in educated programs all my life has influenced that for me.”

My drive to go to college comes from just me. Personally, my family doesn’t really affect, I mean everybody in my family has gone to college and I don’t know. I guess that’s just the norm, after you go to high school, you go to college and even try and get a Master’s at that after you finish undergrad.

Another significant person in Shandra’s life was her older brother who she saw as a strong role model. Although he teased her for attending a “White school,” European-American Shandra knew that it was just “sibling stuff.” She described him as supportive and “always . . . there for any kind of, like, homework help.” Midway through his high school career, her brother moved from a culturally diverse high school to a predominantly White one, where he found the curriculum much more challenging.

But I really knew that he supported me when he had to make a change in high school. He also cared about his education. But he then went into what I was going through. He realized that the curriculum was different. And so how he tackled getting through his assignments and tests . . . because I wasn't in high school yet. I was in middle school when this was going on. [He] showed me that he can do it, and I can do it, too.

Shandra saw many of her brother's accomplishment as breaking racial barriers in a new school where he was now with primarily White peers. He was "the first Black vice president of student council in, I don't know how many years . . . [and] the first Black homecoming king in, I don't know how many years." To achieve these feats, "he found that balance. There were more Black kids at his school [than at mine], but still, there wasn't enough Black kids where he would be with a class of Black kids." While Shandra felt that she stood out for her many accomplishments in her primary and intermediate years, she perceived her brother in a similar light.

And I know this is weird, but I kind of saw a mini me, because I felt like [in my program], I made my impression there, doing what I did. It's not really titles there, but I did a lot of things [there] to be remembered for years to come. I felt like he was doing the exact same thing.

Shandra's maternal grandparents, who she described as "genius level," were also important figures in her life. She had always known that they supported her private education philosophically, but had just learned that her grandfather had paid her tuition to attend the school. "Now that I think about it, I think he was happy that I was getting his money's worth. He supports all of us; me and my older brother. He really supports us in our education." Along with her grandmother, her grandfather always made sure that Shandra was doing well in school.

The family's church community also played a key role in keeping Shandra connected to and anchored in the Black culture. Here, Shandra kept current on the latest culturally sanctioned music, vernacular, and mannerisms.

They also, in a way, kept me Black, too. So, I'd go to church and they'd keep me up on what's going on. Even though [camp] was in the summer, I went into [the gifted program], I guess, being a little Blacker. Like, "I'm Black, you know." And throughout the year, I think if I didn't have my church community, I would've fallen into [more White ways].

At church, Shandra was known as "the smart little Black girl." In her youth group, Shandra would bring maturity and insight into discussions. She recalled that people at church "continued to build me up and support me with being smart, in not stooping down to the levels of those I was around." Shandra faced her share of adversity, including losing her older sister to a congenital heart defect. Through it all, she leaned on her spirituality and maintained her faith, remarking, "God made my life like this on purpose."

Also playing a big role in Shandra's life were friend Samantha and her father, Robert. Shandra described how, in second grade, she and Samantha "just clicked." While crying, Shandra described her bond with Samantha and her family. "Then I let her into my world, invited her over and she was cool. As far as like the Black/White thing goes, like Samantha never saw a difference. They [Samantha's family] accepted me and everything." Shandra and Samantha maintained their friendship from elementary school through middle school, and into high school. But in her sophomore year, Shandra was drawn to Black friends and began to withdraw from Samantha and her other White friends from her elementary and middle school years.

[Samantha] understood the "two worlds," the whole being Black and when she saw me going into the "other world" to be with the Black kids, she understood it.

And she did not leave me. She continued to be my friend. She has even taken the time as one of my White friends to know my Black friends and get to know them and they respect her for getting to know them.

While Shandra credited Samantha for not seeing color, Shandra, herself, perceived Samantha in the same way. “She really is my sister. With her, I do not even see color, I act with her how I want to act.” With Samantha, Shandra felt unconditional acceptance with “whatever I’ll be pulling out of the hat, whatever behavior you know.” This friendship, Shandra noted, would last through college. “If we can do it in high school and not be able to be with each other as much but still be there for each other, I think, even through college, that friendship will last for sure.”

While Shandra, at times, had doubts about her academic proficiency, she perceived Samantha as being “extremely smart” and “always at the top intellectually.” Again, Shandra felt acceptance, as well as reassurance, from Samantha.

She never thought of me as someone who is down. And even to this day she reassures me that even when I think I’m at the bottom in IB [International Baccalaureate program], really I’m not. I’ve never been at the bottom. And so she helped me come to the fact, also, that I’m not dumb. I know I’m not dumb, but you know, when I come to comparing myself . . . she reassures me that I’m not.

Samantha’s father served as another strong male in Shandra’s life, providing invaluable counsel. When she was hesitant to enter the International Baccalaureate program (IB) in high school, Robert advised her to apply. Between her sophomore and junior years, Shandra thought about dropping out of the IB program, Robert told her “push through.”

I think he sees how strong I am, and if I can do it, that I think I’ll open the door for a lot of kids to . . . be an example for them. So he definitely has played a big role in keeping me motivated to stay in accelerated things, things that will keep me wanting to be smart.

Social and Psychological Factors

In her interviews, Shandra did not mention any examples of social injustice from classmates in her school. However, she did experience subtle and unintentional instances of institutional bias. She noted that her race was never openly acknowledged, although she was asked to represent the school. Although Shandra was happy to oblige, she also felt a sense of discomfort.

Honestly, to me, the only time I think they really recognized me as a Black student is when they needed to show their diversity. I remember them asking me to be in a picture for a pamphlet that they had, and I saw pictures of me on the website. And then for speaking, I remember . . . a [public event] and being asked for that. Like, that's not a proper representation of what [the school] is. If someone saw that pamphlet with me on it, that's the only Black kid they would see there. I just kind of went with the flow. But I do remember having these feelings of it not being fair for me to be the only Black student there. Like, why weren't there other [culturally diverse] students there? I'm not angry or anything, but that's the only time I think I had a voice, and I think they were using my voice in the wrong way.

As noted previously, Shandra spoke of the disappointment that more Black students were not able to attend a school for gifted students. "I think everybody should be able to have that education. It's a great education. And I think a lot of kids should be able to have it, and . . . I just wanted my friends to be there with me."

As previously detailed, Shandra was not the only Black student (or culturally diverse student) at the school. However, throughout her interviews, she juxtaposed the perception that she was the only Black student with the reality that there were other culturally diverse students attending the school.

I was somewhat aware that I was . . . the only Black kid there. I remember every Black kid that passed through there. I remember one of my first friends that was Black there was Anwar and then Jamal and then Jesse. Well, [Jesse] had color in

her skin, you know, I remember her. Like she had hair like mine, and, I don't know . . . me and her got really close and there were older Black kids there, but I didn't really know them.

Although Shandra made friends with peers that she related to because of similar racial backgrounds or similar lifestyles, it is important to note that she also counted among her close friends, classmates who did not “match” [emphasis mine] her in either domain. She continued to rely on church friends for cultural affiliation, but for the most part, Shandra's Black world and her White world were separate. The following story provides a glimpse into what happened when the two worlds came face to face.

I remember the basketball team going to a school that had a lot more Black kids. The response [from her classmates] was, “Oh, my god.” They acted like they'd never seen Black kids before, and they had to be protected. I thought that was so ignorant. I said, “Nothing is going to happen to you.” That's when I found myself standing up for Black people. You see me, and you think of me as different like you, but you can't just put that and say that, you know, the other people are different from me, that they have some sort of negative . . . you know. Then I found myself, like, defending my race sometimes. For them, it seemed to me that they saw me as one of them. When it came to talking about other Black kids, or what not, being “ghetto” or what not. I also found myself pulling out the ghetto card sometimes, to show them, you know, “You may not see me acting like that, but I can pull that out, too. To be more comfortable, I act like you guys.”

When Shandra left the gifted program and went to high school, the opportunity to make numerous African-American friends presented itself and the need for cultural affiliation was powerful. But again, Shandra found herself in a predominantly White International Baccalaureate program, situated within a predominantly culturally diverse school.

When I first got into high school, it was a totally new world for me. But I only stuck with the IB kids because that was the world I knew as far as school goes. My freshman year, I felt like the Black community, non-IB, they knew I was smart . . . but they did not really like to get to know me . . . sophomore year, when I started to merge into them more, then they started to seeing what I was about

and not only was I smart, but I was cool. Through the years, I'm a junior now, being around more Black kids, I have definitely added that to the overall me. Even with my Black friends, they see I'm super smart, and don't talk like them.

As Shandra affiliated with more African-American students in high school, she began to think about dropping out of the IB program so that she could attend classes with her Black friends. But with strong support and counsel, she remained in the program, trying to maintain her social standing and her internal motivation to achieve academically.

I found myself going back and forth, but I think more so now. Just like in the IB world, I do not conform to their ways. I stayed who I am which is both. I am still intelligent in their world and I am still Black in their world . . . I feel accepted in both worlds now.

While Shandra expressed feelings of acceptance, when asked how Black IB students are perceived by students outside of the IB program, she noted that she and the few other Black IB students were "seen as uppity" and separate in the IB program. Shandra prided herself on acting naturally, even if other Black students perceived her mannerisms and behaviors as acting White. "And even though I'm still seen as White, I talk White or whatever, they like me because they've gotten to know me, and I've accepted them and gotten to know them."

Summary

Shandra attended a predominantly White private school for gifted students for all of her elementary and middle school years. Although she yearned for Black classmates, she made friends from all cultural and socioeconomic groups, while relying on her family and church to provide her with a strong racial foundation. Once in high school, Shandra struggled to maintain her White friends while making Black friends. This challenge was

intensified by her enrollment in a predominantly White International Baccalaureate program housed in a culturally diverse high school. Despite these challenges and great personal loss, Shandra maintained a strong sense of herself, coupled with an essence of biculturalism. “When I say, ‘fitting in,’ I don’t mean being like them, but I mean being in a group that accepts you for who you are, even if you’re not the norm.”

Morgan

School

When Morgan was in first grade, she was transferred from a parochial school to a private school for gifted children, where she remained until she went to high school.

When asked what she remembered about her K-8 gifted school experience, interestingly, her first memory was of feeling physically different.

And I remember sitting at a desk by myself because my legs were so long. I was a very tall child so they had to have a desk set aside with the table raised higher because my legs were so long. And beyond that, starting out there, I don’t really remember much or feeling different or anything.

Beyond that first impression, Morgan recollected units of study, unit culminations, the school’s urban playground, specific friends, and influential teachers. She remembered that she tried to bring her ethnicity into her units of study, expanding the cultural understandings of her classmates.

I guess, when I was younger, I did do stuff like African-American artists. I’d bring in books about my grandfather [a civil rights leader]. And I would make sure that I told all the other kids about how he was this cool guy, this hero. And he worked with Dr. King. And everybody would be like, “Oh, that’s so cool.” I found ways of bringing it in because I didn’t know really otherwise. I’d always find figures like that to kind of accentuate being African-American and to teach all the other kids really.

Perhaps her most profound memories were those surrounding her twin brother, who also attended the school. While Morgan recalled easily fitting into the learning environment of the school, her brother's experience was quite different. Throughout her eight years at the school, Morgan was called upon to mediate between the teachers and her brother. She also assumed a caretaker position with her twin.

When I went into [the school], I went in with my twin brother. He struggled a lot. He even struggled at a young age because he had a lot of problems adjusting. He was a bit rambunctious. They didn't know how to quite handle him. He was jumping all over the place. He was probably ADD [Attention Deficient Disorder], something going crazy. And that was a challenge because I've always been the protector of my brother. So I'd always tell teachers, "It's okay. Don't worry about it. He's going to be fine." Or I'd cover for him or whatever the deal was.

During her years at the school, Morgan's older brother was also struggling personally. When Morgan was nine years old, he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. There was turmoil at home, and Morgan recalled often going to school in an exhausted state. She remembered that the teachers were loving and encouraging and felt that they kept her "going strong even with stuff going on at home."

I do remember they [the teachers] were completely supportive of all of that. They would give me time, like to take maybe an extra nap or whatever was going on. But it was a hard time throughout that because his struggle was so deep. It directly affected my work at school and my attention at school.

Although Morgan was appreciative that her teachers supported her during these challenging times, she disliked it when teachers would allow the challenges at home to impinge on her school life; her safe haven away from the upheaval at home.

I'd hate it when teachers would be like, "So, your mom called me and told me about last night." That used to drive me nuts, because when I came to school, I wanted to be at school. I didn't want to be thinking about any of that. I just wanted be able to play, like color, like I don't want to talk about. Just let it be.

Despite that, Morgan was greatly influenced by several teachers while at the school. Morgan's last teacher at the school, Pam, was the "most supportive, because she'd always talk to me, or give me an extra sticker, just be like, 'I love you.' She would do things to make sure that I felt important and felt strong with what I was doing." She recalled how Pam was "a great support system" to her personally, emotionally, and academically. Morgan acknowledged the depth of this relationship when she remarked, "She knows everything about me" and "When I was at school, I was ready to just kind of be with her."

She credits Jasmine, the Physical Education teacher, for bringing cultural diversity to a predominantly White staff and student body. Jasmine also exposed Morgan to the Black culture, by taking her to the city's daytime drop-in center for homeless and/or poor women and children, and to the African-American museum. In addition, Jasmine opened up her personal life to Morgan through her young biracial son and by inviting Morgan to her house. "And I just looked up to her so much when I was a kid. I just thought she was this great woman. I had a lot of respect for her while I was there." Morgan's favorite experience at the school was being a part of the city's drop-in center.

I always had a lot of responsibility there. I think that is why I loved it. I loved just being able to give back and to . . . help people, to be a part of it at such a young age. To serve these women food starting at like 10 years old . . . I learned a lot there, I learned just about being humble. I think that not putting myself above others and just . . . at first I think I struggled with it because I thought, like, I felt bad, I guess. Then as I became more comfortable and built relationships with some of the women, it just became so much fun for me. And that's one thing that I miss to death.

Jasmine's impact was crucial because Morgan felt that she "never was around a significant number of Black people except for [preschool]." At first, being at a private

school for gifted students that was principally White did not seem disparate to her.

However, midway through her elementary/middle school career, she began to realize the difference between herself and her classmates. “I don’t think I really noticed that I was different until like fourth grade or something.” Although she had always brought her rich cultural heritage into her independent studies, it wasn’t until she became interested in boys that her race impacted her negatively at school.

I remember doing this play in . . . class. And that was kind of the first big step for me . . . And that was the time when I started liking guys. And I had my little crushes, but nobody would ever like me back. I never had anybody like me at [the school]. I never understood why. I used to say, “Well, it’s just because I’m Black.” I used to make up these things that these boys don’t like me because I’m different than they are. Like, I’m their best friend. I’m buddies with all of them. But none of them can look at me romantically at all.

Morgan remembered herself and her brother as the only African-American students that stayed at the school for the entire eight years that they attended. Although other African-American students would come, they would leave after a year or two.

“Then it was like, ‘I can’t do this anymore.’ And then they’d be gone.” She noted that it was sad to see these classmates leave “because I was still there.”

In [one] class, there was a Black girl that did come in. She was only there for half of a year, though. She always sat in this corner by herself. I remember trying to get her in with the class, like “Let’s go over here.” She was just not comfortable in that situation.

When other African-American students were in the same class, “It would be like, ‘Oh my god, a Black kid in my class.’ It was always a huge thing.” She remembered when an older African-American boy started at the school. “I remember when he came, it was like this huge thing. I was like, ‘It’s a boy. He’s gorgeous because he’s like . . . this is amazing.’” To her eventual dismay, he, too, became just a friend.

Morgan, like Shandra, recalled feelings of academic inferiority at the gifted school. She knew that she needed a certain IQ to attend the school and assumed that she had met that standard.

And these kids are brilliant, you know what I mean? All of them, you just tell them something once, and they're like writing essays about it and making mathematical equations. A lot of times I struggled. I thought that I was below a lot of them because . . . I was doing separate math than a lot of the other kids. I was always in a separate grammar thing. I always got more special attention in some areas than some of the other kids . . . which was frustrating as well. I just know that I had to have been smart enough to get into the school, so I'm meant to be here. So I just looked at it that way, I think, most of the time.

As with Shandra, Morgan's school for gifted students catered to differing learning preference and styles. Having students pursue individual units of interest was a major curricular element in this particular school. Morgan recalled how one teacher encouraged her to bring her ethnicity into her individual units.

Pam would do things, like encourage me trying to find out the Black part of me. Like, "Morgan you love to draw. Why don't you study African-American artists? We can do this and this with it." Like, get me excited about it. Like, "Have you heard of this artist?" What I loved about Pam is she was almost as excited as I was. She knew . . . she actually had information about different artists or information about different people that I hadn't received up until that point. She got me all excited about all of that.

However, despite Pam's encouragement, Morgan was frustrated that the curriculum at the school was not more culturally relevant. If students were interested, they sought out culturally relevant topics, field trips, and resources and incorporated them into their independent units.

I'd always try to bring Blackness, so to speak, into my life. So, I'd study things like African-American artists, or Martin Luther King, or my grandfather. Well, it was frustrating to some extent that I was the one who had to pick a unit on it, to find information. That was the way I could find it. We didn't do very much on it as classes, as a whole. Black History Month, we might do a little something. But

it wasn't that big of a deal. I don't remember doing anything for Martin Luther King Day. Maybe we did, but I don't remember anything specifically that we had any kind of assemblies or anything where we focused on something.

When asked if cultural relevance in her gifted program would have changed the overall experience for her, Morgan was not certain. However, she did feel that "It would've kept more students of color there." After some reflection, she noted, "I don't think it would've changed [my experience] because I was on a roll by myself. So I was just doing my own thing. I was like, 'I'm going to figure out where I need to be.'" She mentioned that her program did not cover Black history, but did include "little things on Martin Luther King, or Rosa Parks, but there are so many other people who are [influential] throughout, that are not just those two."

Without interviewing Morgan's brother, we are left to wonder how he perceived these same school experiences. Morgan provided some evidence as to their differences and how her brother experienced a school for gifted children.

But as I got older, the stuff with my brother got harder because he really didn't fit in. My story and his story . . . would be completely different. He would have said he hated it, like he couldn't just function. And that nobody liked him. He felt put down. And he really struggled at [the school]. And he didn't feel supported at all because they really did look at him almost . . . I don't know. He would try to do better or what not, but he struggled. He needed more help than most of the other people.

In spite of those feelings, Morgan was quick to acknowledge and appreciate the benefits of attending a school for gifted students. Her experientially based school provided her with a multitude of experiences that she would not have had elsewhere.

I can say that no matter what . . . all the experiences that I had there definitely influenced me. Living on a tall ship for two weeks. Who thinks of doing that? I'm terrified of heights, and they had me on the topsail, furling the sail. I'm hanging off, screaming at the top of my lungs. People who I talk to, especially African-

American friends, if I talk about that, they're like, "What the hell? Why would you do that?" I used to go camping. We did this backpacking trip. We did all this stuff. I think truly for me, it was where I needed to be.

Morgan credits the school for helping her to manage her time and set goals, balancing her social life and school responsibilities. "I mean, I wouldn't have grown as much, I don't think, or had the support. I probably would have been more to myself realistically, just kind of kept things more inside." Morgan felt that both the school and her mother taught her "to communicate, and communicate well, and to get across my feelings respectfully, and to get them across with the right words and everything. Like, be personable, and look people in the eye." Because Morgan began high school with her friends from the gifted school, she noted that these friends influenced her to choose advanced classes in high school. Finally, Morgan felt that the school helped her to develop an acceptance of others. The school "kind of opened our eyes to being accepting of everybody . . . to judge anybody was just unacceptable. So, we all know to look at the best in people and look beyond any kind of judgment or things." When thinking back on her experience at the school, Morgan had no regrets.

I wouldn't change a thing. I mean, with every struggle that happened at [the school], with every struggle that happened at [my high school], with my journey and what I've seen in my personal growth, I wouldn't have changed a thing. I know people who probably would have, but I have no regrets in any way because literally those experiences at [the school] made me who I am and I think I'm unique to most of these situations but it just is my strength that came from everything. Everything I've seen and I don't take anything for granted.

Family and Community

Morgan was raised by her parents during her early years and they held high expectations for her. "My parents are the kind of parents that would have had me excel in

whatever I was doing.” However, they separated, and finally divorced, while she attended the school. After the divorce, Morgan became estranged from her father.

That was always an issue because I wouldn’t invite him to things [at school]. Pam would always encourage me to invite him to things but I just couldn’t stand to be around him. But that is different now. We are building it back up again. But it took me a while to learn to forgive.

Morgan was greatly impacted by her two brothers, one twin, and the other, an older sibling. Both struggled with mood disorders. Life with her older, bipolar brother was like “walking on eggshells” and living “in this fear at our house.” Life settled down to some extent when Morgan was in eighth grade and her older brother moved away. However, shortly after he moved away from home, her twin brother was diagnosed with a mood disorder. As mentioned previously, he struggled throughout their years in the gifted program.

When asked how living with her brothers affected her, Morgan noted that she became very self-sufficient at an early age. She described herself as “floating around in the background.” The focus of the family was everywhere but Morgan, who lived in the shadows of her brothers, their needs, and their outbursts. Numerous times, she depicted herself as a caretaker, especially to her twin.

It made me . . . observant of everything. I mean, I spent most of my childhood watching the decisions my older brother was making, and the decisions my twin brother was making, and being protective of my twin brother, trying to keep him sheltered from the pain he was feeling. And I guess just being strong. It made me strong.

At her graduation party, Morgan broke down in tears when she began to talk “about how I was ready to come out from the shadows.” She was ready for people to acknowledge

what she had accomplished. “And kind of really see that it’s not easy to accomplish what I’ve accomplished.”

When asked how she garnered the strength to accomplish what she had, Morgan cited her mother and her grandmother. When describing her mother, Morgan marveled that “she would get up every morning no matter what happened the night before with my brothers or with my dad.” She grew up watching her mother’s inner strength and recalled, “She got up and went to work. She made sure that we had these things but she never stopped working hard for what we needed to do.” Morgan was aware of her mother’s influence on her. “My mom is written all over me in a lot of ways.” While she acknowledged, “I am my mother’s daughter to the fullest,” Morgan was able to clearly perceive herself as a different and unique person. Morgan credited her mother for encouraging her to speak up and maintain a strong voice. “I was not afraid to speak out. I’ve never been afraid to fight for my opinion. She has always been there for that. She is the same way.”

When asked why her family did not move her brother to another school, Morgan observed that her mother, who worked for a philanthropic foundation, was “committed to bringing change” and felt that “you have to sometimes battle through it.” She remembered that her mother “battled hard” with the school, ensuring that Morgan and her brother were in separate classrooms, and making certain that they were “being taught the right things.” Her mother guaranteed that culturally relevant events and presentations were brought into the school. “She always made a point of making sure that she could kind of include us. She would bring things to the class that were about Kwanza. Or come

to our specific classrooms and explain things that were different.” She recalled that her mother “was present in everything. She was there.” Morgan observed a disparity between her mother and the parents of other Black students. She suggested that these other parents were not involved, and perhaps not as committed. “And, at [the school] that’s a huge thing. If your parents aren’t there . . . ‘What’s going on?’”

Morgan comes from a line of “strong, independent African-American women.” Her maternal grandmother, who she described as “an amazing woman,” was widowed to a prominent civil rights leader who worked with Dr. King. “Then my mom learned from her greatness.” Morgan was quick to acknowledge that she had “great people to see after. A lot of strong people.” While she was able to “see their weaknesses as well,” she felt that she could use that awareness and insight to “grow off of that and become stronger.” Although she recognized her mother and grandmother as tremendous influences in her life, Morgan contended that her mother “wasn’t really present. Neither was my grandmother.” She expressed that her strength came from within. “I don’t know where it came from beyond that.” While she lived in the shadow of her brothers’ illnesses, she felt that she “gained that independence and that strength because of that.”

When thinking about who supported her through tough times, Morgan noted, “It used to be [my twin brother]. It was, of course, supportive knowing that he was there with me.” However, she suggested that she didn’t need him in the same way that he needed her. “I think if I hadn’t been there, he wouldn’t have made it. But I didn’t need him. He’s been very dependent on me since we were kids. He’s always been dependent

on me, and I've always been independent." She credits everybody who touched her life as adding to the development of her courage and independence.

When asked if church was important in her life, Morgan noted that she attended church when her father was living with the family. When her parents got divorced, she stopped going. She added that her mother was very spiritual, although she "is not a believer in the church per se. She believes that she can believe and trust and be spiritual and pray, as long as she is taking care of herself and her beliefs and that is what matters." Morgan's beliefs were similar and going to church was not a prominent part of her life.

Social and Psychological Factors

Morgan perceived herself as growing up in a fairly White world. "What's different for me . . . is I've grown up around a lot of affluent people. My mom, she lives in this world that's not Black, by any means. So the people I've always been around have not been Black." This probably accounted for her irritation when her White teachers would look to her as the expert on topics that related to African-Americans.

If there was anything about Black people, everybody would look at me. "I don't know any better than you do, because I've been in the same schooling that you have. I don't know what Black people are like." It drove me nuts. It literally drove me up the wall. I would always say, "I don't know. Why don't you go ask somebody who knows? Why don't you go read a book, because I don't know? Go find a Black person on the street."

Despite her distance from the Black culture, Morgan voiced interest in other African-American students who attended the school, and her disappointment when they departed within a year or two. When asked why she thought they chose to leave the school, Morgan indicated that they did not feel comfortable. "I know the struggle was they didn't have very many friends, or some of the students didn't feel supported."

Financial issues, paying private school tuition, impacted some families, “and I don’t think there was enough recognition of that.” But overall, Morgan cited the need for African-American students to affiliate with more culturally like peers. “They would put it straight up that way, ‘I can’t be in this environment. This is too hard for me. I feel different. I don’t like feeling different, and this is what I need to do.’”

Morgan and her brother were not the only African-American students at the school during their tenure there. However, when I initially spoke to Morgan’s mother about the study, she communicated that Morgan was the only Black student for eight years at the school. In fact, it wasn’t until I sat down with Morgan, even after speaking to the administration of the school and to Morgan’s mother, that I became aware that Morgan had a twin brother that also attended the school. For whatever reason, he had become invisible.

Although Morgan could not fathom attending a traditional school (“If I had to choose, I can’t imagine going to a public school, because I truly believe that that experience kind of made me as strong as I am today”), she was eager to leave the school after eight years. “By eighth grade, I was so ready to get out of there, I could hardly stand it. I knew instantly I was going to a public school.” While her mother talked to her about other options, Morgan was adamant about attending an urban high school.

I got to [high school], and I was like, “This is like heaven.” I was in awe. I’d never seen so many Black people in my entire life, but I was also just in shock. I was coming from [the gifted school], so I was going into X [advanced] and AP [Advanced Placement] classes with my fellow friends. That’s what I knew.

But Morgan’s perception of high school as “heaven” was short lived. “My first year in high school, I had water bottles thrown at me. I was called a whitewash bitch. I

was constantly put down because I was with the White kids. And I didn't understand that." While many of Morgan's White friends from the gifted school took speech and debate, she broke away from the group, and took art classes to meet other people.

Because I didn't take speech and debate, I . . . distanced [myself] from . . . girls who were my best friends. They didn't like me much because I left them . . . or I changed. To me, I haven't changed. I've just decided to meet other people.

Morgan's need to affiliate with other Black students was strong, but she "didn't really know the fine line between building new friendships, and keeping the old, and how to juggle those friendships and relationships that [she] had built." She met her first Black friend at the end of freshman year. This friend introduced her to other Black students and got her onto the basketball team.

She was the first person who kind of showed me Black people. It wasn't the best choice for my first real Black buddy friend. She wasn't a very nice person. And she was a very controlling person. So, because I was vulnerable and trying to be something, she was kind of able to suck me in.

During this time, Morgan remembers being quiet and observant. "I'm very observant of what's going on around me. So, I was watching a lot of the other kids. And I would just kind of mimic things." Through her observations, Morgan worked hard to fit in with new friends; Black friends. It took a situation that was life threatening and uncomfortable on her part to realize that these specific girls did not care about her and were not really friends, after all.

And it was this fake thing of . . . "my sister," and "I love you," and all this. These people didn't truly care about me. I mean, they were always putting me down because I laugh too much. And it usually takes me . . . maybe once or twice, and then I'll get the joke. And I'd always be like, "What?" And they'd be like, "Never mind, Morgan. You're just slow." And things like that, that would put me down constantly. I became this image, which didn't get me anywhere. And after that point I literally told them, "I can't be friends with you anymore. I can't do it. I don't trust you. I've lost myself." And my struggle to fit in so badly like . . . I lost

a piece of myself because I tried too hard almost. And that was really the first step of me kind of knowing that it's okay for me to be me.

Morgan's journey to find and be comfortable with who she was included what she described as "de-Africanization . . . that's tearing each other down. It took me until probably my senior year to be able to say that, 'Y'all are wrong for putting each other down.'" Until the day she left high school, Morgan coped with being called "whitewashed" and "being torn down for being in [advanced] classes." Classmates would mock her giftedness. "'Oh you're smart. Where are you going? We all know you're going to college.'"

Because Morgan is light skinned, her high school classmates often thought that she was biracial. "That drove me nuts, because people would be like 'You're mixed.' I'd be like, 'No. I have a very light-skinned family.'" She was adamant that people shouldn't make judgments based upon stereotypes. "It has nothing to do with anything. I have that good hair. Don't judge! What is good hair? All hair is good hair." Being Black and having White friends brought Morgan another type of adversity when these friends denied her ethnicity.

Somebody asked, "How have you been?" And I said, "I've been chilling." One of my friends was like, "Oh, Morgan, don't talk Black. You're not Black." And I was like, "Oh. Oh, really?" A lot of the jokes were like that. But people would say things. I remember yelling at somebody because they were rapping some song that said the n-word. I said, "Don't say that. That's not appropriate for you to say." And they were like, "Well, why do you care?"

Incidents such as those forced Morgan to "battle to some extent to keep [her] own dignity." She suggested that the incident when a friend said that she wasn't Black did not bother her and that she was able to "let it go." She indicated that she "just laughed it off."

She did not confront the friend with “Screw you. I am Black.” Rather, she perceived the incident as “one of those things. I came home and was like “Huh? That’s crazy.”

As Morgan reflected on her challenging high school years, she felt that these experiences allowed her to “kind of bounce between the worlds.” Morgan noted that her going away party [for college] was the first time that she had seen her two worlds come together.

It was awesome. It was so emotional. And I think it was more powerful to me having everybody there. And to know that everyone was there just for me was very powerful. And kind of crossing the lines and watching people, these worlds that I’ve lived, talking to each other. And getting each other’s numbers. And I was like, “This is cool.” That’s nice to see.

Summary

Morgan, along with her twin brother, attended a private school for gifted students for their entire elementary and middle school years. Growing up, Morgan was not immersed in the Black community, but, nonetheless, missed being surrounded by other Black students in her predominantly White program. Her personal life was turbulent, marked by her parents’ divorce, an estrangement from her father, and the mood disorders of her two brothers. Throughout, her teachers acted as a consistent force in her life and one, in particular, served as a cultural role model. Eager to enter high school and make Black friends, Morgan was soon to discover that cultural affiliation came at a price. Despite these social challenges, Morgan maintained her dignity and continued toward her personal goals. “I wouldn’t change a thing. With every struggle that happened at [the gifted school], with every struggle that happened [in high school], with my journey and what I’ve seen in my personal growth, I wouldn’t have changed a thing.”

Chauncey

School

Chauncey attended a culturally diverse public school until fourth grade, after which he was accepted into a magnet school for gifted students in a neighboring district. This K-8 magnet school was part of a suburban school district that maintained a strong reputation for achievement, while his initial neighborhood school was located in a school district that was perceived in an opposing light. Chauncey attended this magnet school from fourth through eighth grade.

When asked what he remembered about the gifted magnet program, his memories turned to “material [that] was a lot more difficult” and high quality teachers. “Other highlights” included several teachers at the school. One was described as a teacher who “was definitely there for the students. He was definitely a teacher that grew on me. So I still visit him today, if possible, and talk and keep in contact with him.” Friendships stood out for Chauncey, although he did not keep in touch with most of his former classmates. “It’s kind of unfortunate I don’t keep in contact. As soon as high school came, those contacts just kind of broke off because all of us went to different high schools.” He mentioned that “every now and then” they contact each other on Facebook, talking about their experiences from the school.

His fondest recollections were of “immersion,” where for a week, he and fellow students were able to immerse themselves in travel or other in-depth learning activities. He described trips to Taos, New Mexico and Spain that altered his worldview.

Chauncey's classmates at the gifted magnet program were primarily White. Although he insisted, "I didn't see color in [the school]," when asked about the impact of going to this magnet school for gifted students, he was quick to respond, "Biggest thing, being able to deal with White people." For Chauncey, going this school was "like being in the real world at an early age. Because you got to realize when you are going to be working and it's still going to be predominantly White." He noted that going to a largely White school allowed him to learn how to carry himself around White people. When asked if being Black affected his education at the magnet school, Chauncey replied, "I don't think Black had anything to do with the academics that I walked away with from [the school]."

Attending the gifted magnet program allowed Chauncey the opportunity to select the high school he wanted to attend. In addition, the program also provided him with "a stronger educational foundation." He didn't realize how strong his middle school education was until he started high school and worked on skills and concepts that he had already learned in middle school. When asked if he felt as though attending the gifted program was worth it, he replied, "Yeah. I definitely think it was. Just because [the program] gives you so much more than a regular middle school or elementary school do." Again, he mentioned the immersion trips and in-depth learning activities that were not typically provided in other public schools. He also noted that the program instilled a strong work ethic in him and provided him with challenging classes that helped him adjust to high school and, currently, to college.

Chauncey's only recollection of the intersection of his culture and his education was during his junior year when his U. S. history teacher taught about slavery.

She was super passionate. At first I felt like this is just her way to highlight Black people. It was like I'm all for it when it came to teaching history. She admits, as great as this textbook is that we have to teach out of, it is not great because it was written by a White person. All minority cases just have a minute piece in history, when obviously it was a lot larger.

When asked to reflect on where he'd be if he had stayed in his neighborhood school and had not attended the gifted magnet program, Chauncey was certain that he would still be "on the gifted road." He was in the gifted and talented program before attending the magnet program. "So, I'm pretty sure whatever middle school I went to they would have had a program that I would have been involved with." Although he knew that he would be taking advanced classes, Chauncey noted, "I would have had a lot more peer pressure to steer away from the proper path. Because you're going to be around students who aren't in challenging courses." In contrast, at the magnet school, he noted that everyone was taking the same challenging classes.

Family and Community

Chauncey and his younger brother were raised in a two-parent household. He noted "Challenging myself was never a big deal. I never questioned why I am challenging myself." But upon reflection, he did credit his parents and godparents for instilling in him a strong work ethic. "No, you're not going to take easy classes. You're going to take more difficult classes. Push yourself." If his parents weren't getting him involved in enriching activities, his godparents were.

They were coming to my mom and dad and saying, “You should do this.” I think it was them that approached my mom and dad about the [magnet school for gifted students]. “It’s a great school to get your kids to go to,” type of thing. They got me involved in rocket club. Lots of other stuff here and there. Definitely those two are another strong support, academic and socially. And I think it’s just they’re my godparents, but I pretty much call them my aunt and uncle. They are definitely . . . strong supporters of everything I do.

Chauncey’s younger brother also attended the magnet school for gifted students.

While there together, his brother was known as “Chauncey’s little brother” and Chauncey knew that that label bothered him. “I think he told himself coming into high school that would not happen again, and he definitely made that true.” His brother quickly adopted mannerisms stereotypical to young Black people, which Chauncey described as “weren’t great but all weren’t bad either.” Integrating into Black culture allowed his brother an easier transition to a culturally diverse high school. Watching his brother allowed Chauncey to reflect on how close they were, but also how different their personalities were. “I look on my little brother . . . and I call it the ‘Thug 101’ stage, where everybody wants to be hard, and they want to rip something. [They] ain’t never had to do anything on the streets in order to survive.” Thus, he “felt more obligated to do well or set a path for [his] brother.” He hoped that when his brother saw his successes, it would rub off on him.

And so, I think the biggest thing for me, is like, you’re in high school with me. I got to make sure that I don’t do anything that is just outlandish where it’s like, “Oh, really Chauncey, you do that type of thing?” It’s definitely, one thing that I have definitely learned . . . that you do have to actually set goals that your brother can follow or exceed.

When asked who served as his role model, Chauncey indicated his cousin “because he passed the bar after two tests.” He carefully observed what his cousin did because he was “another male that is closer to my age that I see is doing well.”

Faith played a role in Chauncey’s life, but he distanced himself from the church as he got older and didn’t care for the atmosphere and the cliques. He remained in contact with friends from church, but “they [friends] didn’t attend often. If your parents didn’t make you, you didn’t go.” When he did attend church in his younger years, Chauncey found a strong Black community. “The kids are a little more real, as far as just mannerisms and things like that are different.”

Chauncey credited his church community for helping him transition to a more culturally diverse high school. “Honestly, it [the transition] wasn’t difficult for me. I think it’s because I knew ahead of time. I’d been in positions where I was around White people. I’ve also been in conditions [with] my church around Black people.” Although he felt “extremely ready for that: just all that diversity, new people, new environment in general,” he did acknowledge that he was nervous starting freshman year because he didn’t know anybody. He also realized that he was going to be immersed in a culturally diverse environment that he hadn’t been in since early elementary school. For Chauncey, adjusting to the high school social scene was getting used to people’s differing mannerisms. Making friends and finding a group to affiliate with “has nothing to do with color.” Chauncey believed that “you can always tell who you want to hang out with.” According to Chauncey, each year “got progressively better. But as far as like making friends, doing different stuff, it definitely got better for me.”

Social and Psychological Factors

While attending the gifted program, Chauncey maintained a sense of colorblindness. He attributed this to being in a predominantly White school, even though he attended a Black church and attended a culturally diverse school for years before attending the magnet school.

I was in a predominantly White class and I had no problem with that, because I can honestly tell you that I didn't see color. Being colorblind definitely depends on the person, but also I think it comes from the environment that you are in. Because I am pretty sure if I did stay at [the public elementary school], which was a predominantly like a minority/majority type school, I probably would have realized color, because then my next school following up would have been . . . [other] minority/majority type schools. So, I definitely would have realized color right away, but I think because I went from [the public elementary school], predominately minority/majority, then to [the magnet program], it was more like you just had to get to know these new people and that is all that was. And then eventually you got used to the system and those people that were minorities at [the magnet school], you hung out with them just as much as you deal with the people back at the elementary, type of thing.

Chauncey hung out with whomever he wanted to and maintained "I did not realize I was the only Black male for a minute." Juxtaposed against that perspective was the awareness of his race and his acknowledgement that it was reassuring to have other Black students attend the same school, especially those that were close to him.

It was also comforting because I did have family at [the gifted] school. My cousins, not really my cousins, but my godparents' kids, they went there and then my brother eventually went there in third grade. So, that made it easier. You do have Black foundation that you really know, because they are your family.

As time went on, Chauncey began to notice that he was the only Black male in his eighth grade class. Because of this, he was eager to attend a diverse high school. "It was like a new experience. I [was] around a lot of Black people, which I had never really been around since elementary [school]. I didn't even remember that to be honest with you."

Confronting his ethnicity occurred quickly in high school when classmates wanted to know which middle school he had attended.

“Oh, I went to [the magnet school for gifted students].” And then, first of all, they have to get past the fact that it’s a “smart” school. And then they’d be like, “I hear there’s not a lot of Black people there.” “No, there weren’t.” And then they try to give you stuff about that.

Chauncey recalled an incident during his freshman year when a Black football player said to him, “What are you doing playing lacrosse? That’s not a Black person’s sport. You could play basketball, baseball, something, but not lacrosse.” This caused Chauncey to start thinking about racial stereotypes. “But it’s just one of those things that definitely became real to me when people were pointing out that this is not a typical Black thing to do.”

Chauncey continued to deal with subtle, but racist comments in high school. Mostly, these remarks came from other Black students and focused on being both Black and gifted.

And people would always crack little comments. What always bothered me, to be personal, like what I heard a couple times in high school was, “Oh, you’re a smart Black kid.” And it kind of gets to me because it’s like, “Wow! Are you really saying I’m a smart Black kid? Like in other words you’re saying Black people shouldn’t be where I’m at?” And when Black kids are approaching you and saying that, you know there’s a problem. I didn’t look at it like that, but I definitely see it now. But, yeah, it was more Black kids that approached me about the racial, being successful type of thing, doing stuff that wasn’t stereotypically Black. And it was always awkward to me, because like, “Why? Why do you have to hate on me, type of thing. Because I’m Black and I’m doing well?” It didn’t make much sense to me. People always call you out for being smart and stuff like that. I don’t know why it seems to be a threat to do well outside of sports.

On that note, I asked Chauncey why gifted programming and advanced classes were not appealing to Black students. He detailed how some Black high school athletes

“didn’t realize that you have to have grades, too, to go somewhere. You don’t understand that you just can’t get into any school off of talent alone. You do have to maintain a GPA when you get there.” He also noted that some students do not understand “the possibilities of what an education can do . . . because all they see right now is either music, football, basketball.” He suggested that many Black classmates are drawn to sports and entertainment, sensing an easy and accessible way to make easy money.

They see that you make money right away if you are good at it. Even if you’re not good at it, you are still going to be making six figures as you are sitting on the bench. If they are content with that, they’ll be willing to do that.

When Chauncey was asked if education could help turn that around, he replied, “I don’t think there is anything that teachers can do. Kids listen to a point, but it’s definitely something that the media can do.” He felt that the media held much more power to influence young people. “It’s more like the media definitely has to start highlighting successful Black men and women, just as much as they do White, if not more.” And these images have to saturate everyday media, not just media serving the Black population. Chauncey noted that images of White success stories were everywhere in the media, and mentioned how unfair that was.

I don’t think I really got on this like “Black” thing until I saw *Undercover Brother* [a movie that spoofs Black exploitation films of the 1970’s] and Dave Chappelle’s character, Conspiracy Brother. Man, that was just so funny how he turned everything into a conspiracy. If you think about it, it’s like “Wow! That makes some sense right there.”

His parents agreed that it was funny, but urged him to stop joking around about it.

To cope with some of these inequities, Chauncey admitted that when he was with Black friends, they made jokes about White people. “It is definitely a way to cope. You

know, you're joking around about it, but if you think about it, it's not funny. It's real stuff." When asked if it was difficult to balance being in both the Black world and the White world, Chauncey replied, "It's not difficult for me to go between White and Black." However, he acknowledged that when peer pressure was involved, it was a different situation.

Personally, I don't feel like it's hard but when there's peer pressure. When I say peer pressure, you are around your Black friends, but you are at a White party. Are you going to act Black? Are you just going to blend in? I don't want to say act White, because I don't want to feel that I act White. It just depends. When there's peer pressure, it becomes a lot more difficult, because you are around your Black friends, but you don't want to look like that kid that's just . . . he could easily take to White people. They still have it in their mind that you're Black. This is Black. This is Black. This is Black.

Through his comments, Chauncey made it clear that Black friends, more than White ones, exerted this type of pressure and that the demand to affiliate with Black friends was strong. He admitted that this pressure swayed him.

It's kind of hypocritical for me to say that, because if you are going to joke around about it, but then be able to turn around and be like buddy-buddy with that person, but it's sincere buddy-buddy, it is hypocritical. I realize that. But that's when the peer pressure comes in. Everybody wants to fit in with everybody, but then everybody wants to keep that identity to themselves. If you are around Black people you may want to keep that identity. You kind of don't want to break that too, because you realize that you are Black.

When asked if there would be a time when that pressure to affiliate might diminish, Chauncey felt that it wouldn't. He used an example of a future work place where peer pressure was exerted even among adults.

There is going to be that one Black coworker that I work with. They have just as many jokes as I have now and then it's just like, we're together. We got to be real. All of a sudden, as soon as a White person walks by, they might change.

He noted that there was an unspoken code with other Blacks regarding acting Black and acting White.

I personally cut people slack, because I realize that is the environment you're in. You got to be different and it's unfortunate that you can't always be yourself, you know. If you want to be cliché about it, you want to always be yourself. No, you can't always be yourself. Sometimes you just have to realize when to conform.

In finding a personal balance between the demands of the Black world and the White world, Chauncey commented, "If everybody can reach a fact where they realize that they are different around certain people, or certain groups, and it doesn't affect them in any way that's negative, that's great." He noted that he had met numerous people that had influenced him and opened his mind to new and novel ideas.

I realized that when you're around White people, you have to be different. If you're around Asian people, you have to be different. And when you're around your own people, you're going to be different. As long as you recognize that, and you don't see it as a negative thing, and you realize that it's just because I'm in that environment that I have to be different, then you're good.

Chauncey wasn't able to verbalize these types of racial issues until he met another bright Black young man with similar values, in his final years of high school.

Because I think that's [when] I really understood it and was able to put it into words. Because I also found a friend. Me and him are really alike and he goes to [a different university] right now. And we continue to talk about racial things like that. Because we both recognize that this is someone else that I can really talk to about it.

Summary

Chauncey attended a public magnet school for gifted students from fourth through eighth grade. Within this suburban, predominantly White school, Chauncey assumed a colorblind persona, remarking that he didn't even notice his own race compared to those of his classmates. However, he also noted that he felt more comfortable knowing that his

brother and the children of his godparents attended as well. It wasn't until high school that Chauncey was confronted with racial stereotypes and his choice to be academically successful. "Why do you have to hate on me type of thing? Because I'm Black and I'm doing well?" Despite being influenced by some peer pressure, Chauncey maintained his academic standing in high school and pursued his goal of attending college.

Malik

School

Malik attended three different magnet programs for gifted students from sixth to eighth grade; two in suburban districts and the other in the city. He spent almost two years in the first program. Although the suburban middle school that housed this program was culturally diverse, Malik recalled that there were only four Black students in the program.

For the last two months of seventh grade, Malik attended a gifted program in the city. While the gifted program was housed in a culturally diverse middle school, Malik was the only Black student in his class. "There were two Hispanic girls in my class, and then there was one Indian. He was a really meek, small Indian boy." This program proved inadequate for his academic needs.

Yeah, I don't know how they modeled it, but the GT [gifted and talented] program was not for gifted and talented people. This program is not what I'm used to at all. It's like I could go back to where I came from and have work that's harder than this.

To accommodate Malik's academic needs, administrators rebuilt his class schedule so that he attended eighth grade classes. He recalled that while it was "a good attempt," this modification was not adequate and his classes remained too easy.

Finally, he attended a third school district for eighth grade, enrolling in a GT program housed in a middle school. Again, Malik was the only Black student in his class. “There’s a half-Black kid in my class. In all of my classes, well, not all of them, but in that program, there’s a half-Black kid, and then there’s me. And that’s it; everybody else is White.” He remembered doing work that was at an appropriate level for him within this program. Malik continued his academic career in this same district, attending high school within its boundaries. “Then I come to [high school]. AP classes, and honors classes . . . I’m the only Black kid in any of these classes.”

No matter which of the three gifted programs he attended, Malik recalled being either the only Black student or one of a few Black students. He also remembered succumbing to peer pressure when he was young.

All the stuff kids do to be popular. I use to say curse words. I use to do a lot of stuff that was ridiculous. One day I got caught by [the principal]. That was the first really big, I don’t know if that was the first one, [but] that was one of the really big things. I got in really big trouble. I learned my lesson from then on because my mom did not like that at all. And so, that was that.

He recalled that his overall experience at the first magnet program was not a particularly good one. He suggested that it might have been less than stellar because of the middle school in which it was situated. “It might just be the fact that it was [the school] because [it] is a widely known not very good middle school.” However, the gifted program did provide Malik with an appropriate academic challenge. But because the gifted program was located in a culturally diverse middle school, Malik’s Black peers saw him in a negative light. “Like he doesn’t act right and he doesn’t act like he should act. A large Black kid . . . he’s totally not meeting that. Something is wrong with that.

They don't like it." Malik got in fights with several Black classmates "probably stemming from the fact that I just don't act like these kids think I should act and it's probably because they're young and they associate me with something that I am just not." He suggested, "It's not something that I can fix. It's just how I am." While he was doing well in school, "it was . . . the outside of the academic piece where stuff was just really bad." In sixth grade, Malik connected with his math and science teacher, noting, "I learned. That year was a good year. Everything was going fine." However, at the end of that year, Malik's teacher moved.

Malik had many memories of the new teacher, but they were not positive ones. "Me and him [had] a load of problems." While accepting responsibility for doing "some bad stuff," Malik felt that this teacher "was really fast to jump on me." He recalled an incident where he was perceived as disruptive in class and was given detention. When Malik was not able to serve his 30-minute detention before or after school (because of parental scheduling conflicts), the punishment turned into a full day in-school suspension. "Then we run into a problem there, because first off, I didn't do anything anyway. It was like I was being punished for something that just did not happen. It's like they were determined to give me this detention." Malik asked if he could serve the time during lunch and that request was denied. Malik had vivid memories of talking to the school principal and asking how a half hour detention could turn into a full day suspension. "So I was like, 'Why does it go from a half hour of detention to a full day of in-school suspension when it could just be a half-day?' And they're like, 'It just does.' There was just no defense."

Malik recalled that his grades with this teacher were not at the same level as with other teachers and their classes. "I'm turning in stuff and he's not putting them [grades] in. There was a lot of stuff that went on." When asked to reflect on the underlying causes, Malik noted that this teacher was very young and suggested that he might have been intimidated by Malik's size. "I was a big kid. When I was in 7th grade, I was almost 5'9". I was a really big kid. And he was probably about the same height as me, but I was bigger than him." This notion made sense to Malik, especially since the teacher had accused him of being a bully.

First, all of the things that he accused me of, he was accusing me of being a bully. I took so much offense, because I have never been that. I didn't understand why he thought that, because that's never been me. I get along with everybody. I just didn't get it. I didn't understand why he would think that about me or anything.

Although this teacher got along well with the other Black student in the program, Malik did consider the possibility of racism. "I'm not really fast to play this card, but I honestly think there was a racial issue going on. I don't know what it was." Malik was eager to leave the magnet program, "just because of him." When asked if he had experienced anything like that at any of his other schools, he remarked that he had never encountered anything similar, prior or subsequent to this teacher. "And when I went to [the city school], I got along with everybody. There was never a problem with me or anybody or any of my teachers." He noted that in all of his schools, the majority of his teachers were White, and that race had never been an issue.

In fact, he expressed strong feelings that students of all races should feel comfortable with teachers of any and all races, and vice versa. "Teachers should acknowledge that there are differences in any classroom. You need to acknowledge . . .

these differences in race.” He suggested that education should honor differences and avoid “creating or . . . spreading the gap” between differing peoples. He suggested that “We’re all . . . there to do the same thing which is to learn and . . . all teachers are there to teach.” Admittedly, “a Black student might have culturally . . . similar background with their Black teacher and . . . there might be a bridge in culture between them and . . . their White teacher but the fact is [the teacher is] there to teach you.”

Once Malik arrived at his third gifted program, he felt as though he had found a place where he could be Black and gifted. However, even there his status was the source of attention. “The fact that I am Black and I’m in all these upper classes. It was almost like it brought on a different kind of attention. Like, he is a different sort of Black kid.” Different classmates reacted in different ways.

Like some people, you know, like some of these kids are like, that’s a good thing. Some of them just, I guess that didn’t faze them at all. There’s a few kids that did think it was a bad thing. Some just didn’t take to me . . . because I didn’t act like I should be.

Malik reported that, “The White ones were the ones who were not reacting. You know, like, “He’s not acting the way he should.” However, Black classmates indicated, “We need to fix this.” Generally, his experience was that “The White kids did not react. It was the Black kids who decided to do something about it.” And what they did was to exert pressure on Malik to act Black. This will be discussed further in the section entitled *Social and Psychological Factors*.

In spite of dealing with the strain of peer pressure, Malik was successful academically. In fact, another strong recollection of his years in gifted programming was

that school was easy for him. “It was like I was just doing school.” However, once he got to high school, he did begin to experience feelings of academic inferiority.

Actually junior year, I started getting this feeling like I’m just not as good at school as everybody thinks I am, and as I thought I am, as I thought I was. I just felt like school has started to beat me. Before, I was on top of school. Now, it seems like school is on top of me.

Regardless of these challenges, when asked if being enrolled in gifted programming was beneficial for him, Malik maintained that it was, noting, “Yeah, by far. Because I think, just me, personally . . . I put personal potential above social acceptance.” Malik compared himself to his Black peers and suggested, “There’s a lot of Black kids who . . . are not doing what they’re capable of. I think that, me being in these programs, it’s made me do what I’m capable of.” But he was also quick to note the down side. “Being in these programs has been a cause of me not fitting in completely with either group. Because most of these classes . . . most of the kids in my classes have been White.” The notion of fitting in is further explored in the section entitled *Social and Psychological Factors*.

Family and Community

Malik and his brother were raised by a single mother, and maintained no contact with their respective fathers. His mother was described as having grown up “in Black communities, with Black family. She, by far, meets the old Black stereotype, by far, and meets it a lot more clearly than I do.” Malik depicted his mother and his grandmother as strong and influential figures who raised their children to behave according to set family standards and to speak standard English. In fact, Malik reported that, while growing up, his mother and her siblings were punished for speaking nonstandard English.

My mom's mother raised them, raised all of her kids, in a very strict household where there was . . . a high standard of social acceptance. She emphasized that proper English was required. "You need to speak proper English in my house." My mom tells me she's nowhere near as strict as her mom was about anything, but proper English. My mom has always emphasized proper English. When [my mother] was growing up, her mom emphasized, "You need to act acceptable. You need to act in a civil manner at all times. When we go to the store or when we go anywhere, don't go acting 'fool.' Just don't act up, act civil." But it's not because she needs to be accepted by society, it's because there's an image that's associated with civility and acting in a socially acceptable way and that's the image that you should naturally want to have.

Although Malik was surrounded by White classmates and friends in school, he affiliated "with Black community" outside of school. He noted that most of the people that his family associated with were Black. Malik recalled growing up in a part of town "where there's a lot of bad society." He described how his mother would let him play with the neighborhood children, but wouldn't let him go over to some of their homes because she was felt as though she was doing a better job than some of the other neighborhood parents; purposefully raising her sons differently.

So, even then, my Mom didn't let me grow up the way a lot of other the kids around did. It's a predominately Black area. She did not let me grow up the same way those kids were growing up. She would let me hang out with them in certain situations and all of that. But when it's time to come back home and come back inside there was a different rearing than the other kids got.

To that end, Malik's mother held high academic expectations for him. In fact, he maintained, "My mom has really been the only one." Although she supported his dream to become an actor, she continued to push his academics. And when he lost focus in school, she was there to urge him on. "She is like a constant drive for what I want to do because she knows what I am going to do, as far as school goes, as far as my acting." He

observed that, “She has always been there and really the only one to kind of drive that.” He also credited some of his mother’s friends as being influential, as well.

Although Malik’s father had not been present in his life for many years, and Malik felt that he was not an influence in his academic life, his father and his thespian accomplishments remained significant, nonetheless. Malik noted that his father had been in commercials and was a member of the Screen Actor’s Guild. “It was just that I knew what he had done. I used to admire him a lot for that stuff. I have always wanted to follow in his footsteps. That was what drove my dreams.”

Malik’s brother, three years younger, was perceived by Malik as too young to be an influence. However, when he spoke of his younger brother and how his mother drove him to excel, there was a hint of admiration in his voice. “So I think overall, he is bound to be successful at whether it’s his artistic ability or whether it’s some sport, track or basketball. He is going to be successful in something.”

Social and Psychological Factors

Because he was always enrolled in gifted programming, Malik perceived himself as “an exception” compared to his Black peers. “Most Black kids . . . are not in the same types of these academic programs that I’ve always been in.” Without any hint of arrogance, he noted, “There’s a stereotype that is attributed to Black people and Black students. I’ve never met the stereotype.” In fact, Malik pointed out that he was quick to go “against social standards and acceptance. If something doesn’t fit to me, but it fits to everybody else, I’m not going to go with it. That’s just me.” He emphasized, “I try not to

meet people's social things, because it's just stereotypes. It's a bunch of stereotypes, and I don't like stereotypes."

Although stereotypical Black behaviors were not as acceptable in Malik's suburban, predominantly White high school, "the Black kids are still meeting that stereotype." He felt as though his distance from these stereotypical behaviors allowed him to project a certain image and connect with his teachers, avoiding issues such as those he experienced while attending the gifted magnet program. Just days before our interview, Malik and other high achieving Black students at his high school were summoned to the office and asked if they would mentor other Black students at the school. Apparently, the "Black students are not doing as well as their other students, specifically the White students. So it's an issue for them, and they feel they need to do something about it." Malik added that his Black friends who attended traditional high school classes "don't necessarily have issues with their teachers, but they don't . . . connect with the staff as well as I do. They just don't."

Throughout the interviews, Malik was resolute in his desire to defy stereotypes. "I don't like stereotypes. I don't like stereotyping people and I don't like to meet stereotypes. I like to be associated with my character. I think just the way my mom has raised me." And so there was a time when Malik didn't pay much attention to the racial remarks of his classmates. By his own admission, it did not affect him when other students would remark that he was acting White, which happened "all the time." However, one day, his mother was privy to those kinds of remarks.

I met two of my friends in the store one time. My mom was there and they made some comment about how, "This is the most White acting Black guy I've ever

met.” My mom was standing there and her jaw dropped. Then, it didn’t faze me. Then, I was okay with it. Then we got home and Mom was almost livid. She didn’t understand why I allowed that to happen. And I didn’t get, like, why she was taking it like that? Because I was okay with it. And then it took her to explain to me, and it took me some social reflection to really kind of like grasp how not okay that is.

His mother’s reaction and the subsequent personal reflection led Malik to acknowledge and honor his race, and refute any ties to cultural stereotypes. He admitted that stereotypes about how Black and White people act existed and that he possessed elements from each. He attributed this to maintaining an affiliation with the Black community outside of school, while attending predominantly White schools. “It’s like there’s been a mix of both of them since first grade.” He credited this mix and his mother’s rearing as the main “reason for me not fitting either one completely. I fit both of them in some ways, but I don’t fit either one of them completely. I think the difference with me is because I’m . . . in the middle of both stereotypes.”

Malik relayed how his White high school classmates were accepting of Black peers who acted Black or acted White, but were less so with him. The White students “intermingle with those ones that meet either stereotype completely. But me . . . I’m so in the middle that I have to find other people.” While he had both Black and White friends, some classmates didn’t know how to accept him. “I guess it’s just because some groups, on either side, are just more willing to accept” students who meet a stereotype. He emphasized, “We all act like what we are. We are what we are.” Malik was adamant that attaching race to a person’s character was unacceptable.

I’m not White. I’m Black. That’s just it, period. That’s the bottom line. And you can say I act whatever way, but when it comes to me, I’m not going to say that I

act White, because I'm not White. I've never been White. I'm not going to be White. I'm a Black. I'm an African-American person.

I asked Malik how he now reacted when people told him that he acted White. His reply to others was, "'No, I don't. I act like me.' Or sometimes I won't even say it. I'll say, 'No, I don't.'" Malik conveyed that one "friend" [my emphasis] continually greeted him with "'What's up, Whitey?'" When asked if this individual was Black or White, Malik replied that his friend was White, and that his Black friends don't say that he acts White as much as his White friends. He said that a few Black friends have said that he acted White, and when he confronted the situation head-on, "They pick it up better than the White kids." He explained, "It's because most of my Black friends do, I guess, fit the stereotype. They do act like what, I guess, society expects Black students . . . to act like."

While Malik has had to deal with peer pressure to act Black, he did not feel that he was ever pressured to hide or dilute his intellectual talents. "First off, it's always been totally the opposite." His family and friends have been supportive, have acknowledged his gifts, and have held high expectations for him. "I feel like there's a standard [that] everybody, my family and my friends, have set for me that I need to stay at." He noted that the high standards that he set for himself "came from their high standards. I used to not care, and now I do have a high standard. That standard is from their high standard for me."

Summary

Although Malik was raised in the Black community, his mother was insistent that he assume mannerisms, behaviors, and attitudes associated with the dominant culture. From sixth to eighth grade, Malik attended three different public magnet programs for

gifted students, where, in each, he was either the only Black student or one of a few Black students. His academic years were fraught with peer pressure to act Black, causing Malik to falter between cultural norms and to finally assume a bicultural identity. This struggle and the challenge of finding like-minded peers brought about great stress and resulted in a deep awareness of the personal costs of being academically successful. “I put personal potential above social acceptance.”

Chapter Summary

The preceding profiles provide descriptive glimpses into the educational experiences of four young people, and the meanings that each has ascribed to these reminiscences. “The passage of time enables people to make sense of earlier events in their lives. Actions take on new significance depending on their later consequences” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 34). The significance and implications of their journeys through gifted programming, especially in light of their later experiences, will be explored in the coming chapter by answering this study’s research questions. Broader themes will be discussed; those common threads that weave through these stories making them both curiously unique and representative.

Chapter Five: Findings

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I provided descriptions of the educational experiences of four gifted African-American students, interwoven with natural interpretation. In this chapter, I answer the first three research questions that guided this study with further interpretations and connections to relevant literature. Next, I present and evaluate the themes that emerged from analyzing the data. Finally, I respond to the fourth research question, examining implications and proffering recommendations for educators, administrators, and policy makers who steer the course of gifted education.

Question One: What Challenges Did These Students Experience?

School Policies and Issues

In considering the educational policies that guided the gifted programming of the young people interviewed, some background information may be pertinent. While not the direct focus of this study, this information provides further insight into the problems that plague gifted Black students, and the study participants, in particular. (Much of this specific information was taken from school and school district websites unless otherwise noted. To protect the confidentiality of the study's participants, these sources will not be cited.)

Two of the young people interviewed for this study attended tuition-free public programs, while the other two individuals were enrolled in tuition-based private programs. While this sample seems like it might provide a varied perspective on gifted programming, it is crucial to note that all of these young people perceived being the only Black student or one of a few Black students in his or her program. Each expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction about being separate from racially similar peers, and most longed for more diversity in their programs.

While public programs for the gifted have been created to serve the specific needs of each community's most able members, the fact that these programs do not reflect the ethnic makeup of the communities in which they exist should be noted. In the community served by Malik's program, approximately 21% of the school district's students were Black. However, Malik noted, "I think there were four Black kids in my class, including me." Those four Black students amounted to less than 3% of a program that included approximately 150 students in grades 6-8 (L. Sullivan, personal communication, June 23, 2008). In Chauncey's home district, 14% of the students were Black, while approximately 5% of his gifted classmates were Black (C. Jones, personal communication, June 24, 2008). Chauncey recalled, "It became more noticeable to me that I was the only Black male of my eighth grade class."

The city in which both Shandra and Morgan attended their gifted programs boasts a diverse ethnic population, including approximately 11.1% African-American, 31.7% Hispanic, 2.8% Asian, and 1.3% Native American peoples. Both girls noted that few other Black students attended their programs while they did, leaving them with little

sense of racial affiliation. Shandra noted, “I’d walk into class, and I was still the only Black kid there,” while Morgan remembered, “I think I was the only one of color in that class specifically.”

While numerous researchers (Callahan, 2005; Grantham, 2002; Hilliard, 2003; Perry, 2003; Steele, 2003) point to belief systems and practices that account for the under-representation of Blacks in gifted programs, most of these values and procedures remain beyond the scope of this study. However, it may be useful to touch upon practices and procedures where pertinent information is available.

Although IQ tests are commonly used to identify students for gifted programming, researchers (Callahan, 2005; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Hilliard, 2003) contend that using intelligence tests solely to examine giftedness leads to the under-identification of culturally diverse learners. Two of the programs that study participants attended required IQ testing that was heavily, though not exclusively, considered for admission.

All of the gifted programs attended by study participants examined a range of information for admission purposes, as suggested by educators (Briggs & Reis, 2004; Callahan, 2005; Shore et al., 1991). However, some of these assessment tools may contribute to the low numbers of Black students enrolled. One such commonly used measure is the teacher recommendation, used by three of the four programs highlighted in this study. To successfully identify Black students for gifted programming, teachers must have a sufficient understanding of giftedness, in addition to a thorough awareness and appreciation that Black students possess compelling cultural differences from their White

peers, as well as from other culturally diverse classmates. This in-depth knowledge of the complex nature of Black gifted students is not commonly found in classroom teachers (Ford, 1998; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). Briggs and Reiss (2004) contend that teachers who accurately refer culturally diverse students for gifted programming tend to possess a keen consciousness of their own culture, the cultures of their students, and the complex interplay between them. Culturally responsive educators are aware that research suggests a link between teacher prejudice and underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programming (Elhoweris et al., 2005).

Two programs highlighted in this study looked heavily at student performance from the state assessment program, report cards, the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), and/or student work samples. Callahan (2005) warns that culturally diverse students may lack basic skills and experiences that reduce the likelihood that they will perform well in class and on assessments, while Ford and Trotman (2001) caution that traditional evaluative measures do not sufficiently capture the strengths of culturally diverse students. In this study, one program required that students be highly motivated as well as achieve at grade level in all core subjects and above grade level in at least one core subject. Such a requirement negates the complexities of gifted underachievement. In fact, Ford (1992) found that 80% of formally identified gifted Black students were underachievers.

In terms of other program policies, only Shandra expressed discomfort that her image was used in her program's public relations materials. Although she agreed to the situation and felt happy to be a part of it, she was concerned her image didn't attract other

culturally diverse students to the program. “If they would have gone to that [program], they’d see the same girl in that pamphlet, not her with a bunch of other Black kids having fun.”

Curricular and Instruction Issues

As noted in the literature review in Chapter 2, cultural differences affect teaching and learning in a multitude of ways. As Gay (2000) suggested, “Culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these in turn, affect how we teach and learn” (p. 9). Culturally responsive teachers help their diverse students make connections between their personal lives and the broader world (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Only Morgan credited one of her teachers, a biracial woman, for opening her eyes to her own culture, while another teacher, who was White, encouraged her to study her culture within her independent units. Shandra also mentioned one teacher who was Black, the first that she had ever seen, but this individual left the program when she was young. Neither Malik nor Chauncey noted any teachers of color in their gifted programs. With only 8.4% of the nation’s teachers being Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), it is not surprising that these young people saw few, if any, Black teachers. But the scarcity of Black teachers holds great significance when viewed from the needs and challenges of Black students (Hale, 2001).

None of these young people mentioned that their teachers employed gifted pedagogy and/or curricula that were also multicultural in nature. While it may be easy to dismiss this given that 83% of today’s teachers are White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), and have little to no training, awareness, and/or interest in culturally responsive practices

and multicultural principles (Gallavan, 1998), the fact remains that this powerful omission further perpetuates the inferiority of minority students in their own eyes as well in the eyes of the dominant culture (Steele, 1992; Villegas, 1988).

Further, none of the participants perceived their teachers as educators who recognized their complex needs and strengths as both gifted and Black students. None of them detailed how their teachers were able to counsel them as Black gifted adolescents. In fact, two of these young people expressed instances where they felt academically inferior to their White classmates, but did not mention any program support for these potentially devastating perceptions. Malik observed that he had no opportunity to voice his position when he was perceived as a bully. His only advocate, his mother, was equally dismissed by administrators. While all of the adolescents felt that their programs addressed their giftedness through challenging content, none was perceived as addressing both giftedness and multiculturalism.

The importance of creating a learning environment where gifted culturally diverse students can feel encouraged and secure in exploring and expressing their individualism is paramount (Ford & Trotman, 2001). Shandra was supported in expressing her individualism through drama and theatre, although, in class, her verve and communal work style (Boykin, 1994) were not perceived as positive traits. Chauncey remembered only a standard unit on slavery, with no other mention of his culture or its relevance within his program. Malik's experiences were fraught with external pressure to act Black juxtaposed against his internal motivation to achieve. He admitted that he "put personal potential above social acceptance" a symbol of racelessness (Fordham, 1988), which will

be explored in depth in the following section entitled *Social and Emotional Issues*. In addition, Malik perceived instances of racism and injustice, certainly not features of a safe and accepting atmosphere in which to seek personal validation and discover cultural relevance.

Delivering curricular options that match the unique needs and characteristics of learners that are different from other students is often given as an important goal of both gifted education and multicultural education (Briggs & Reis, 2004; Ford, 2004). But in all four of the gifted programs highlighted in this study, although participants' differing cultural styles were evident, they did not appear to be understood or maximized.

Generally, African-American students have been found to be field-dependent learners who prefer communal learning experiences and may require some organization from the teacher (Daniels, 2002; Ford, 1995; Ford & Milner, 2005; Shade, 1994). Generally, they learn more effectively through observation, modeling, and demonstration rather than through passive means of receiving information, such as direct instruction (Shade, 1994). Girls are more likely to be field-dependent than boys (Santo, n.d.). Shandra recalled being talkative and, thus, separated from her friends in the gifted program, rather than being encouraged to work communally. Throughout her years in the program, she asked questions "all the time" seeking additional clarification and explanation. Morgan noted, "It was a struggle . . . for me because I'm the kind of learner that you have to show me things to understand it." Thus, both girls, as well as Chauncey, required extra support in math, a left-brained sequential skill more difficult for field-dependent thinkers. Shandra was placed in a math group with other learners who were

perceived as needing extra support in math. Of the six students in this math group, three were Black, and their teachers (which included me) did not understand that learning style was likely the reason they ended up grouped together. We did not recognize what could or should be done to support them as Black learners.

Field-dependent individuals are more affected by criticism, verbal praise, relationships, and social orientation (McNair, n.d.). Shandra was negatively impacted by the proficiency labels (novice, developing, proficient, exceptional) in her gifted program, but sought the report card section “where the teachers were praising me.” From this, she developed a preference for the impersonality of letter grades, and an appreciation for “learning what I needed to learn.” Sadly, three of the students had negative perceptions of themselves as students, as typified by Morgan’s remarks:

A lot of times I struggled. I needed more attention in math, so I was in a separate math class than most of the other kids, which was frustrating as well. I thought that I was below a lot of them because I would be doing . . . my math course. I was doing separate math than a lot of the other kids. I was always in a separate grammar thing. I always got more special attention in some areas than some of the other kids.

African-American students are likely to be tactile, kinesthetic learners, finding success when more actively involved in their learning (Boykin, 1994; Daniels, 2002; Ford & Milner, 2005; Hale, 2001). While Shandra and Morgan were fortunate enough to attend programs that encouraged personalized, self-directed learning, neither found cultural relevance in studies that were teacher directed. Chauncey was enthusiastic about his program’s week-long, interactive travel experiences, but experienced little that was significant to being Black. Malik struggled to find relevance in his programs, grappling with both social and cultural acceptance.

Boykin's (1994) dimensions of African-American expression include expressive individualism marked by a dramatic flair for personal expression (Shade, 1994). Shandra commented that her teachers "were always telling me to be quiet. Like lower . . . use my inside voice." This fits with the practice of calling out, which I observed when I attended high school with Shandra as a pilot to this study. African-Americans come from a rich tradition of storytelling and oral history. This often equates to a circular style of thinking, speaking, and writing that was evident in Malik's and Shandra's oral speech patterns (our "hour-long" interview sessions stretched into two and three hour talks). More importantly, three participants noted their weaknesses in written communication skills that each carried into high school. It is common for teachers to not fully understand and appreciate these differences, and to attempt to alter these communication patterns to resemble those most familiar to them; those of the dominant culture. While good intentioned, teachers can cause irrevocable harm to students' abilities, motivation, and self-worth (Gay, 2000).

Nurturing creativity is a recommended practice for all children, not just those deemed gifted (Shore et al., 1991). However, creativity in schools is likely to be based upon the dominant culture's values, and Black students tend to exhibit culturally specific "creative positives" (Torrance et al., 1998, p. 19), which correlate with Boykin's (1994) nine dimensions of African-American expression. If Black students believe that their creative expressions are not valued, they may dismiss a part of their racial identity, which could negatively impact their self-esteem (Kopala, 2000). Within the stories of this

study's talented young people, only Shandra noted that her gifted program was creative or involved activities that encouraged or enhanced creativity.

Discussing and solving real problems have long been advocated within both gifted education (Maker, 1982a; Renzulli, 1977) and multicultural education (Banks, 2001, 2003; Grant & Sleeter, 2003). Only Morgan, within her program, was encouraged to talk about her ethnicity, engage in service learning, and examine the harsh realities of the larger society. It appears that the other three programs took a more colorblind, politically correct slant, typical to the institution of school (Ford & Harris, 1999; Schofield, 2001).

Derived from the collective values of the Black community, Black students tend to have a social orientation (Fordham, 1988) where they use not only their prior experiences, but also their race, to organize and recall information. When educational strategies affirm and build on Black students' culture and cultural styles, they perform to even higher levels (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999). To reject or ignore the implementation of multicultural materials and practices diminishes the "processing and acquisition of the information" (Shade, 1994, p. 181), and one is left to wonder how the educational experiences of these young people might have been further optimized had their programs been built upon their unique cultural styles.

Social and Emotional Issues

To gain a deeper perspective of the challenges faced by the participants, a glimpse into how each young person perceived him or herself, within the context of his or her gifted program, is provided. Shandra described herself as having "toughed it out," while

Morgan felt, “You have to sometimes battle through it.” Malik fought his peers physically and negative stereotypes figuratively, while Chauncey took a neutral, raceless stance. Shandra and Morgan perceived themselves as less able than their classmates, while all of them articulated some academic weakness. Malik felt very capable in middle school, but was hit with feelings of inadequacy in high school.

Three of these young people recalled “standing out” in some way. Shandra chose to stand out in dramatic performances. “I left a big impression, because the roles that I was playing in were traditionally played by someone White. The fact that I blew the crowd away with these lead roles, I think that’s something they’ll never forget.” Morgan recalled, “I tried to look beyond the fact that I stood apart, but I made myself known. I’d do things like, ‘Well, hello.’” However, when she began to be interested in boys, she was confused as to why none of her White classmates liked her back. Eventually, she wondered if it was because she was Black. Malik noted, “The fact that I am Black and I’m in all these upper classes. It was almost like it brought on a different kind of attention. Like, he is a different sort of Black kid.”

In 1983, Fordham (1988) found that high achieving Black students were forced to choose between their culture and academic achievement. Twenty-five years later, this same forced choice appears to have plagued the young people in this study. Each chose to reject an “anti-achievement ethic” (p. 61), and struggled through feelings of alienation, isolation, duality, conflict, and ambivalence. As previously noted, each participant voiced feelings of alienation from other Black children, either by virtue of attending a primarily White educational program and/or by being isolated from Black playmates at home.

Each described their dual reality; “the persistent questioning of how they are accepted by both Black and White people” (Fordham, 1988, p. 63). Malik depicted not fitting in easily with either Black or White classmates. He voiced hesitation at being pigeon holed in either world. When asked if he moved between both cultures, he responded, “Well, actually, sometimes, yeah. No, at all times, I act like me. And ‘me’ is, I guess, that middle ground. But sometimes, I’ll fit in more on either side.” Chauncey commented on acting differently around different people. “I realized when you’re around White people, you have to be different. And when you’re around your own people, you’re going to be different. It’s not difficult for me to go between White and Black, whatever.” Shandra found herself adjusting to whatever situation she found herself in. “A lot of people, my friends, have told me that I’m a chameleon.” However, she acknowledged, “They are different worlds.” Morgan saw herself “gaining respect in both worlds,” but it took her entire high school years to achieve some sense of balance. “And now I know how to communicate within the worlds, and comfortably. I can do it now confidently as well and not lose myself. And I do juggle them.” This movement between both cultures denotes a biculturalism that Ford (1994) suggests is due to a high level of resilience. Black students who change their behaviors and adjust to specific situations are said to “code switch” (p. 84).

The multitude of emotions and conflicts from switching back and forth between cultures is cause for great stress (Fordham, 1988). Shandra experienced a time in high school when she minimized her academic performance and considered dropping out of the IB program. When enrolled in a traditional (non IB) class, she noted, “I didn’t want to

just be the super smart one answering all the questions. The teacher at the time knew that. Falling into that, my work wasn't as good as it could have been." Malik described his high school's well-intentioned attempt at having high achieving Black students mentor less successful Black students. However, the result of being successful for Malik had the potential to further separate and isolate him from his Black classmates. While institutions perceive such intentions as integrating Black students into the school culture, they are actually causing more of a divide between the Black students in their school community (Fordham, 1988). Morgan recalled the painful transition going into high school. "I kind of distanced myself from . . . girls who were my best friends [in the gifted program]. And that was a huge thing because they didn't like me much because I left them . . . or I changed." When Morgan tried to "fit in" with Black classmates, she was "vulnerable" and trying hard to be someone she wasn't. She detailed, "I lost a piece of myself because I tried too hard almost." Chauncey described the stress of duality and peer pressure. "You are around your Black friends, but . . . at a White party. Are you going to act Black? Are you . . . going to blend in? I don't want to say act White, because I don't want to feel that I act White."

Fordham (1988) notes that some high achieving Black students develop a raceless persona "characterized by inconspicuousness and seemingly invisibility" (p. 72). Chauncey's comments indicate such racelessness, characterized by a sense of colorblindness, even toward himself. "I didn't see color in [my program]. I can honestly say that, because I did not realize I was the only Black male for a minute." In addition, Chauncey seemed less willing than the others to acknowledge behaviors stereotypically

attributed to Blacks. His comments took on a politically correct tone. “It was just I had to get used to people’s mannerisms. That has nothing to do with color.”

With less identification with the Black community, all of these young people experienced situations where others denied or denigrated their race. Tragically, all of these gifted individuals had been told that they exhibited behaviors or participated in activities not typically attributed to Blacks. In other words, they had been accused of acting White. Malik was called “Whitey,” “the Whitest Black kid,” and “the most White acting Black guy I’ve ever met.” Morgan was continually told that she was “mixed,” and “whitewashed,” while a supposed friend told her, “Don’t talk Black. You’re not Black.” Shandra commented, “Even acting myself, it still comes off to them as being White. It’s more so how I talk, the words that I use.” Her reaction (along with a friend) was, “We’re White. Duh. We’re Oreos.”

Whether this move away from the Black culture is conscious or not, real or not, it is the perception by the Black community that determines one’s membership in the fictive kinship system (Fordham, 1988). “One can be Black in color, but . . . be denied membership by the group” (p. 56) because one’s behaviors, attitudes, and activities are perceived as a threat to the survival of the Black community. Such was the case with Malik, who struggled with the stress of duality and rejection. “Kids actually reacted on this thought of me being different than what I should be.” Because two of Malik’s gifted programs were housed in culturally diverse schools, his struggles with Black classmates came during middle school. The other participants grappled with these same issues, but mainly once they left their predominantly White programs and attended culturally diverse

high schools. Then each was rejected for assimilating into the culture of school and for choosing to achieve. Shandra remarked, “I felt like the Black community . . . they knew I was smart . . . but they did not really like to get to know me.” She also noted that the Black students in the traditional academic program “noticed the Black kids in IB and . . . they think that they are stuck up because they won’t . . . merge.” Morgan described her rejection as “de-Africanization” and detailed her struggle.

That’s tearing each other down. It took me until probably my senior year to be able to say that, “Y’all are wrong for putting each other down.” That struggle with me being called “whitewashed” or being torn down for being in X classes. I still dealt with that to the end of the last day of my senior year. People would be like, “Oh you’re smart. Where are you going? We all know you’re going to college,” and all this stuff.

Like the other participants, Chauncey was also confronted with his choice to be academically successful.

It was more Black kids that approached me about the racial, being successful type of thing, doing stuff that wasn’t stereotypically Black. And it was always awkward to me, because like, “‘Why? Why do you have to hate on me type of thing? Because I’m Black and I’m doing well?’” It didn’t make much sense to me.

Isolated from their racial group by attending predominantly White programs, these high achieving Black students turned to White classmates for affiliation and approval. But being compared to White classmates can lead to more angst, greater social isolation, and wounded self-esteem (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Only Chauncey perceived himself as academically able and as socially successful as his White classmates. The girls saw themselves as less able academically than their White classmates, although they were accepted socially. Finally, Malik perceived himself as equal academically to his White

classmates during gifted programming, but not socially accepted by either Blacks or Whites.

Racial Identity

Inseparable from the social emotional issues of gifted African-American students is the development and embodiment of racial identity, and neither can be examined without looking at issues related to school performance (Branch, 1994; Ford & Harris, 1999; Fordham, 1988).

A commonly accepted construct of racial identity, the Cross (1995) model of Nigrescence, is an effective lens through which to examine “the psychology of being Black” (p. 94) as experienced by this study’s participants. Although originally conceived to map adult behaviors, Cross noted that the model has been “successfully extended . . . to adolescent identity development” (p. 94). It was once thought that people moved through the stages of the model once in their lives, but Cross suggests that challenges “may induce [a] person to recycle through some of the stages” (p. 95).

In using Cross’ (1995) model of racial identity, it is not my goal to identify in which stage or stages participants are or have been. Rather, it is my intent to have the participants speak for themselves and to illuminate the racial challenges that have existed and continue to exist for them. Further, through this discussion of racial identity, I wish to put a familiar face on the complex dilemmas and issues that Black students bring to our classrooms, so that in the future all culturally diverse students will be better understood, constantly heard, and always acknowledged.

In Cross' (1995) pre-encounter stage, individuals minimize the significance of their race or view their race as a problem. Young people may minimize their racial status by acting in ways that are associated with the dominant society, distancing themselves from their own Blackness, and/or focusing more on academics than on social relationships (Ford, 1996). Morgan noted that she "never was around a significant number of Black people" and that her family's rich heritage of social justice "was kind of insignificant at the time." Chauncey's inability to see his own Blackness amid his White classmates suggests a neutrality about his own race. Malik's comment, "I put personal potential above social acceptance," is a paradigmatic description of the pre-encounter stage. All of the participants in this study showed a defining characteristic of this level of racial identity; that of wanting to be viewed as human beings rather than being associated with any particular race, typified by Malik's comment, "I don't want to be classified in anything at all." While experiences at the pre-encounter stage might seem relatively benign, those who remain at this level may experience weak self-concept, confusion, self-deprecation, and indifference toward the Black community (Ford). As the products of the culturally dominant educational system, Black students develop a worldview that restricts their "knowledge about, and . . . capacity to advocate for the cultural, political, economic, and historical interests of Black people" (Cross, p. 100).

Cross' (1995) second stage of racial development, the encounter stage, involves experiences that force those at this stage to change or expand their attitudes about race, now accepting the significance of their race. Such encounters are marked by strong emotions, such as confusion, guilt, anger, and anxiety, though usually these are

internalized. Clearly, it is impossible to discern such complex and personal moments within other people, but Malik did provide evidence of an experience that might have marked this type of reevaluation of his identity. This happened when his mother was privy to racial remarks made to Malik's face. She was angry that Malik did not confront the friend that made the remarks. But subsequent comments suggest that perhaps she also realized the social consequences that resulted from distancing him from his peers. "That took a long time; for my mom to see it, and then for me to see it from my mom, and just me seeing it on my own." Shandra described a realization when her White classmates, playing basketball at an urban school "acted like they'd never seen Black kids before, and they had to be protected. I thought that was so ignorant. That's when I found myself standing up for Black people." Morgan shared a number of incidents in high school where her race was dismissed and denigrated, such as when a friend remarked that she wasn't Black. Morgan noted, "There would be little things like that that I'd have to battle . . . to keep my own dignity." Chauncey was confronted by high school peers who questioned his non-stereotypical behaviors, such as playing lacrosse ("That's not a Black person's sport") and attending a gifted program ("Oh, you're a smart Black kid"). From the bewilderment, betrayal, shame, and stress that gifted Black students feel in the encounter stage, Ford (1996) suggests that they develop a stronger sense of their own ethnicity. For the study's participants, it appears that each was confronted by his/her ethnicity and worked through how being Black fit into his/her individual self-concept.

Individuals in Cross' (1995) third phase, the immersion-emersion stage, begin the process of constructing a racial frame of reference by accepting themselves as Blacks.

Here, students try to rid themselves of their invisibility and racelessness. Black students may glorify their racial identification and pride through strong emotions, risky and/or destructive behaviors, and demonstrations. Some may underachieve to prove that they are not adopting behaviors or values associated with the dominant culture (Ford, 1996).

When Shandra was exposed to the Black community in high school, she seriously considered dropping out of the IB program and toyed with letting social acceptance take priority over her academic achievement. To fit in with new friends in high school, Morgan got involved with “a situation that was really life threatening.” Through this experience, she realized that her conformity might have brought some degree of social acceptance, but did not make her more Black. Chauncey’s transition to a more Black orientation and his need for identity markers are alluded to with his discovery of Dave Chappelle and his parody of racial stereotypes, politics, and pop culture.

The fourth phase of Cross’ (1995) stages, the internalization stage, marks an internalization of a broader frame of reference, whether it is bicultural, multicultural, or nationalistic, that allows Black individuals to focus on issues beyond those of personal racial identity. Individuals tend to be more at peace with themselves and their Blackness, achieving a more self-accepting, calm, and secure demeanor. In this level, gifted Black students regard academic achievement in a positive light, and maintain a balance between being successful in school and being an accepted member of the Black community (Ford, 1996). Although at times Shandra was seen as acting White in high school, she maintained, “I just act how I act now. I’m just me, you know? I don’t really care. I tried to talk different and what not, but now I’m not conscious of it at all. I’m just me, you

know.” Later in high school, Morgan finally reconnected with longtime friends from her gifted program.

That was really the first step of me kind of knowing that it’s okay for me to be me. I became this image, which didn’t get me anywhere. And I mean that’s still going to be a part of me. Like, I’ve gained great relationships. And now I know how to communicate within the worlds, and comfortably. I can do it now confidently as well and not lose myself.

When asked to read his interview transcript and make any revisions needed, Malik included the following comment, which clearly held significance for him.

I am Black, which is something that I do connect with, and part of the reason that I tell people off when they say those kinds of things is because I don’t want ANYONE to think that I don’t realize my African-American background. Cody, for instance, he calls me “Whitey,” which leads me to believe that he thinks I *want* to be White. I very much enjoy and embrace my being Black, and would not have it any other way; that does not mean I want to fit a stereotype, the *Black* stereotype. The personality called *Malik* is able to be a free spirit and not adhere to any one category created by society. That personality belongs to someone who was born Black and likes it [all emphasis his].

Chauncey was asked to comment if he ever lost a sense of himself when he acted differently around different people in different environments.

I personally don’t, because I’ve met so many people that opened my mind to just different ideas and everything like that. And me finding myself is just my identity. I’ve already begun on a really good foundation for myself. So for me, personally, having an identity crisis is nonexistent, which is positive. I think that if everybody can reach a fact where they realize that they are different around certain people, or certain groups, and it doesn’t affect them in any way that’s negative, that’s great.

The final stage of Cross’ (1995) model of racial development is the internalization-commitment stage. This stage is denoted by action, rather than reaction, as individuals commit themselves to African-American issues and causes. In this final stage, Black students work to bring about changes for Blacks and other culturally diverse groups through organizations, clubs, and other groups concerned with social justice

issues (Ford, 1996). For Shandra, this was evident in her desire to reinstate and organize the International Baccalaureate Black Organization (IBBO). But once she conceived of that, her goals stretched farther.

But then when I thought more about it I was like, “Well, I don’t want to do it just for IB because I have a lot of friends who are outside of IB that don’t even have what the kids that are in IB have, like the opportunities.” I thought about starting a support group for the class of 2008, since I’ll be a senior next year. The main goal is to graduate and to get kids on the right track for at least going to college in state. Well, also another goal is getting more kids on the honor roll, and I didn’t want to make it just for Black kids because I still have White friends in the regular program, too.

Morgan developed a mentorship program between her gifted program and her high school where “just a group of kids from [the high school] . . . go over there [the gifted program] few times a month . . . and just play with . . . African-American students.” She described the impact that she hoped the program would have on the gifted Black students.

It was the best feeling ever, just knowing that they are having somebody in high school that they can look up to. They’re going to get there. Look at us. We are doing fine. Especially me, being from [the gifted program]. A lot of the kids connected to me, because I’d be like, “I went here, too. Look at me now. I’m cool. I’m doing things with my life. I’m not struggling.”

Chauncey was involved in several high school organizations that mentored and tutored other students, and Malik, at the time of the interviews, was just being recruited at his high school for a similar program.

Although Cross’ (1995) model of racial identity has been referred to as simplistic, it does provide a structure through which to examine the psychological, social, and emotional challenges that Black gifted students face (Ford, 1996). What is not simplistic is the array of complicated moral dilemmas and choices that these young people must

confront when trying to form their racial identities. “Gifted Black students are especially vulnerable to problems if they feel less accepted by peers, teachers, and parents” (Ford, p. 106). I would contend that these challenges are worsened by an educational system, though well intended, that does not recognize the depth, the intricacies, and the importance of these dilemmas.

Summary

Booker T. Washington is credited with saying, “I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles he has overcome while trying to succeed.” If success is truly measured as thus, then all of the remarkable young people highlighted in this study have already reached a level of success only dreamed of by others. But how did they face these obstacles and still maintain an identity of achievement? What support systems have helped them through the moral morass? The next section serves to answer these questions and add to our understanding of the resiliency and efficacy of these young people.

Question Two: What Resources and/or Supports Helped Participants Face Their Challenges?

Although Gallagher (2002) suggests that “support systems do not happen by accident” (p. 24), the experiences of the students in this study suggest that gifted Black students traverse their complex issues with few formal support systems, especially within their gifted programs.

Family Support

In each family unit described in this study, most of the factors that Clark (1983) maintained play a role in academic success were found. Each participant depicted a positive relationship between him or herself and at least one parent, high behavioral and academic expectations, and parental involvement in his or her education. Although none of the young people spoke specifically of the transmission of hope, one can assume its presence in these families through each adolescent's description of future plans, including college attendance and professional career choices. Consistency, another of Clark's factors, was also not directly detailed in any of the student narratives, but again evidence could be found as to its place in each family. Malik described how he was not allowed to go to his friends' homes if his mother did not approve of how they were reared. Church was a consistent factor for both Chauncey and Shandra. Because Morgan's home life was often chaotic, her parents made sure that her life at school, consistent for eight years, served as a constant and calm refuge.

Although only Morgan described parental volunteerism, other levels of parent involvement, as described by Ford and Harris (1999) were seen in these families. Foremost, each family sought out an educational environment that would hopefully nourish the needs of their gifted child, and provided a home environment that encouraged and fostered subsequent school success. Perry (2003) noted how parents can discuss ways to deal with racism and can help their children develop a sense of racial pride. This was evident in episodes told by Shandra and Malik about their mothers. Shandra noted, "She just always told me that I was different and it's okay to be different and be strong and be

who I was.” Malik detailed how his mother was furious that he was not disturbed by racist remarks and worked with him to understand their toxicity. All of the families highlighted in this study seemed to motivate their children to work hard in order to achieve academically (Perry, 2003). Although Silverstein (2000) suggests that parents can provide stability and support as their children grapple with the development of their racial identities and the bridging of cultures, it is not thoroughly obvious from the limited scope of this study how these parents aided their children through these challenges. Whether these parents encouraged these young people to see academic achievement as complementary to their African-American values, as a family value, as a means to success, or as all three is not readily apparent. What is apparent is that all of these families served, in various ways, as role models to and advocates for their children, encouraging and motivating them to be high achieving, even when it meant, as in Malik’s case, social rejection. Chauncey described his cousin who passed the bar, Shandra detailed her brother who made his mark in a predominantly White program, Morgan depicted her mother and grandparents as passionate, influential individuals “committed to bringing change,” and Malik portrayed his mother and grandmother as strong women determined to raise their children with “a high standard of social acceptance.” Although Morgan’s twin brother was troubled and relied on her for support, she admitted that she also relied on him. “It was, of course, supportive knowing that he was there with me.”

Each participant described the role of extended family in his or her life. Both Morgan and Malik described strong and influential grandmothers, and Morgan noted the importance of her grandfather’s imminence as a civil rights pioneer. Shandra described

how her grandparents supported her and her siblings' educational pursuits, both emotionally and financially. Chauncey discussed the role of his godparents; family friends that were seen as extended family.

Finally, each participant was impacted in some way by a sibling or siblings, also in gifted programming. Shandra served as a role model to her younger sibling, while relying on her older brother as a role model. Morgan was a caretaker to her troubled sibling, but also recognized the support that he provided her. Chauncey acknowledged the role that his "cousins" played in his school life. "It was also comforting because I did have family [in the program]." In addition, he took his role as a positive example to his younger brother seriously, after seeing that his brother was adopting more stereotypical Black mannerisms. "I've felt more obligated to do well or set a path for my brother." Interesting enough, Chauncey felt that his younger brother was taking a different path because he had been known as "the little brother." Finally, Malik appeared to admire his younger brother and the success toward which he was headed.

Although formalized support systems were not in place for these young people, the role of immediate and extended family seemed to have provided enough essential grounding, connection, and affiliation to support academic achievement in spite of the challenges faced.

Teacher and School Support

Each of the programs highlighted by participants emphasized high academic and behavior expectations. All of the participants observed that their programs had prepared them well for high school and beyond.

Both Shandra and Morgan attended programs that allowed for a more active and involved learning style (suggested by Boykin, 1994; Daniels, 2002; Ford & Milner, 2005; Hale, 2001). When asked what he recalled about his program, Chauncey was quick to mention immersion experiences, which he found engaging and memorable. At least one program promoted drama, which allowed Shandra an avenue for her expressiveness, verve, and oral proclivity. It is interesting to note that both Shandra and Malik hope to pursue theater careers. All participants mentioned the importance of establishing relationships with their teachers, although only Morgan's teachers and program impacted her in a culturally responsive manner.

Having teachers who are exceptionally skilled, culturally responsive, and trained in gifted education is especially important for gifted Black students, as they tend to be more socially oriented, pay closer attention to social cues, and prefer and seek communal learning experiences (Hale, 2001; McNair, n.d.). Black students tend to place more importance on the people in the learning environment, particularly the teacher, than on the physical features of the classroom or the school. Thus, "African-American students rely on their perception of the teacher and the affective aspects of the environment to determine their involvement with learning" (Shade, 1994, p. 179). All four young people in this study mentioned the ability of their teachers to develop caring relationships with them, one of the characteristics found in exemplary culturally responsive teachers (Foster, 1994; Gay, 2000; Harmon, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). When asked what they remembered about their gifted programs, two of the young people mentioned their teachers before detailing anything else about their experiences. Each participant noted

specific connections with teachers that made their learning more personal and successful. Malik recalled, “Me and him connected really well. We had a really good connection. I learned. That year was a good year.” Shandra described how difficult it was for her to say goodbye to her teachers once they left the program.

Your teachers are there with you and you really do develop something. I know things in their life might change, but sometimes, maybe they’ll understand how big of a bond you did have. I guess I would want them [departing teachers] to know how much of an impact they do have in our lives. And how important it is to keep contact.

For both Shandra and Morgan, the caring relationships of their teachers supported them through traumatic events in their lives. For Morgan, it was the ongoing chaos of her home life and the instability of her brothers. For Shandra, it was the premature death of her 11 year-old sister.

Despite the extent and complexity of the social, emotional, and racial issues of high achieving Black students, counseling support was not mentioned by any of the study participants. Because counseling support was either not provided or not accessed, it suggests that these gifted programs did not thoroughly comprehend the impact of the Black fictive kinship system on student performance and social standing, did not grasp the significance of the choice that students were forced to make between being successful academically and being accepted socially, and did not realize the consequences of feeling isolated from and/or rejected by culturally similar peers. Further, the apparent lack of counseling suggests that these programs did not appreciate what might happen when these students were reintroduced to other Black students after years of being in predominantly White programs. While two of the gifted programs highlighted mentioned

teaching “the whole child,” I suggest that predominantly White educational institutions, while well intended, do not fully grasp the complexities of the whole Black child.

Community Support

Shandra, Chauncey, and Morgan all had ties to their churches, which typically provide character education, religious grounding, and cultural education (Hale, 2001). Shandra appeared to be the most spiritual of the four. “God made my life like this on purpose.” As a Black child immersed in a predominantly White educational program, Shandra acknowledged the importance of church as a means to develop and maintain a sense of Blackness and a firm connection to the Black community.

So, they continued to build me up and support me with being smart, in not stooping down to the levels of those I was around, you know. They also, in a way, kept me Black, too. If that makes any sense, you know. They kept me up on what music was going on. So, I’d go to church and they’d keep me up on what’s going on. Not only that, as far as when I was younger, having a Black community, I went to a Black camp, too.

Although numerous researchers (Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004; Ford & Harris, 1999; Hale, 2001; Torrance et al., 1998) note the importance of mentors and role models for gifted culturally diverse students, none of the participants noted positive examples from their communities at large during their years in gifted education. While the complexity of the problems surrounding the lack of community support for Black gifted students is beyond the scope of this study, the significance of the issue and its impact must be noted.

Over twenty years after Fordham and Ogbu (1986) wrote, “Apparently, Black children’s general perception that academic pursuit is ‘acting White’ is learned in the Black community” (p. 23), it is apparent that tremendous peer pressure to act Black

(Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008) still exists. Although researchers (Branch, 1994; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Perry, 2003) have called for Black communities and organizations to examine their attitudes regarding achievement and success, and to dispel the notion that academic success leads to assimilation into the dominant frame of reference, it appears that these attitudes continue to prevail and support for the Black community's brightest students is still lacking.

Peer Support

The importance of friends as a support system through turbulent teenage years is commonly acknowledged. But given the social dilemmas for the gifted Black student, as well as the isolation from Black peers for those who attend predominantly White programs, this issue becomes more multifaceted.

Shandra detailed her relationship with a White friend. "Samantha accepted me from the beginning. And she never thought of me as a chameleon, she just thought of me as Shandra. She understood the 'two worlds,' the whole being Black." When Samantha saw Shandra's desire for relationships with Black peers in high school, Samantha understood her need to affiliate with Black classmates. "She saw me going into the 'other world' to be with the Black kids, she understood it. And she did not leave me. She continued to be my friend." Shandra also spoke of a biracial classmate (Jesse) in her gifted program. "She had color in her skin . . . like she had hair like mine. Me and her got really close. I felt like I wasn't alone anymore." Shandra also noted that Jesse was someone who she could identify with in terms of social economic status. "Honestly, she was the first person that I let come over to my house. Because like everyone would invite

me to their house, but after seeing their houses, I didn't want anybody to come to my house."

Morgan had close friendships with both girls and boys in her gifted program. "I mean, I'm still friends with some of those kids, oddly enough. But the girls that I'm friends with from preschool, I'm definitely the only one of color out of that group." Going into high school, Morgan took X and AP classes with her White friends from her gifted program. However, she quickly began taking different classes to meet new people. "Well, I'm one of the few who actually has a different group of friends now." Eventually, Morgan reconnected with some of her earlier friends and made new friends, but found that she was fine being alone. "I don't need anyone else to be happy." Talking about an old friend, Morgan recalled their intertwining paths.

We came to [high school]. I found my new friends. She found hers and it wasn't until this summer that we reconnected. And we've been hanging out all the time ever since. We were best friends at [the gifted program], but we just are completely compatible personalities. We've lived the same lives. But it's one of those things that we both knew [in high school] that we'd eventually come back together, but we needed the experience, I think. And she was one of those people that I knew wasn't out of my life forever, so it's cool to have her back.

Malik mentioned friendships throughout his interviews, but often times these passages revealed social and/or racial conflicts rather than support. He remarked that once in high school, he felt encouraged by family and friends. "I feel like there's a standard, everybody, my family and my friends have set for me, that I need to stay at." Malik also noted that he felt a sense of academic competitiveness with his classmates, a theme also echoed by Morgan. "I'll see kids that are like they got four on this AP test, and I'm like, 'I need to be better than that.'"

Chauncey noted making good friends in his program, but “those contacts just kind of broke off” when they all went off to different high schools. When Black kids in high school challenged him about “being successful” and “doing stuff that wasn’t stereotypically Black,” Chauncey felt awkward and confused. He admitted that he “didn’t look at it like that, but I definitely see it now,” meaning that he now sees that these types of remarks were coming from Black classmates, not White ones. He kept his feelings to himself until his junior year.

Because I think that’s where I really understood it and was able to put it into words. Because I also found a friend. Me and him are really alike and he goes to [a local university] right now. We continue to talk about racial things like that. And we talk about this and that, “back in the day,” and stuff like that. Because we both recognize that this is someone else that I can really talk to about it.

Of the study’s participants, three described close friends with whom they could discuss issues of race easily and comfortably. Only Malik did not seem to have that type of relationship with someone his own age. However, each of these young people found the strength of support from someone to develop a strong identity of achievement (Perry, 2003). Branch (1994) contends that role models are “not likely to significantly impact a child’s view of self and his/her ability to accomplish new goals if children don’t see themselves as competent and capable of aspiring to what the role model has attained” (p. 219). Given that all of the study participants aspire to college and careers, their role models appear significant enough to impact their self-perceptions and motivate them to pursue a positive and productive place in society for themselves.

*Question Three: What Impact Did Their Educational Experiences Have on Their Lives
After Leaving the Gifted School or Program?*

To assess the impact of gifted programming, I asked each participant if attending a gifted program had been worth it. Each young person stated that he or she believed that it was. Malik remarked, “I think, overall, yes, it was worth it, by far,” while Morgan commented, “For me, it was. I think truly for me, it was where I needed to be.” Like other Black students attending predominantly White institutions (Henfield, 2006; Hertzog, 2003; Horvat & Antonio, 1999), each participant in this study felt that he or she profited from the experience and that the benefits outweighed any hardships.

Benefits detailed by participants included strong educational foundations that served as preparation for high school and college. Several participants mentioned that their programs taught them organizational skills such as time management and goal setting, and helped them to develop strong work ethics. Those programs that followed more experiential philosophies offered unique experiences, such as educational trips, not found in traditional programs, and ones that students might not have experienced with their families. Several noted that had they been enrolled in a traditional educational program, they might not have taken challenging high school classes.

These young people felt that their programs encouraged them to develop into resilient individuals, willing to voice strong opinions and stand up for personal beliefs. Several credited their gifted programs with helping them develop to their potentials. “It has allowed me to be what I’m capable of,” noted Malik. Morgan stated, “I wouldn’t have grown as much, I don’t think, or had the support. I probably would have been more

to myself realistically, just kind of kept things more inside.” Most individuals mentioned making life long friends, and being more accepting of others and their differences.

Morgan also noted that she learned how to adapt to new situations and that she had “taken that to new experiences that I’ve had.” Each voiced that being in a predominantly White environment gave them the experiences and skills to “deal with White people” comfortably and interact with Whites without feeling prejudged.

Although none of these young people recalled their teachers teaching to their cultural styles or preferences, both Shandra and Morgan came away from their programs with an awareness of their individual learning styles. Shandra noted that she was an auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learner who needed to “go back to the time when I was learning it and how I was writing,” while Morgan needed a small, personal environment. She also noted that although she earned straight A’s in high school, she did not test well.

So I know I don’t test well, and I have failed many of the tests. And I know the information, but I just don’t test well. My homework, and my presence and my work ethic, that’s what keeps me there. My organization, that’s what keeps me with those grades.

Malik noted his propensity for learning languages. “I have a technique for learning languages in my head. I just kind of grab it. It makes sense. And even when it doesn’t make sense, usually I make it make sense a lot faster than everybody else.” Three of these young people noted their weak academic areas and described times when they needed extra help from adults at school and/or home.

As previously noted, Morgan described instances in her gifted program when her individual and cultural differences were addressed. She was encouraged and supported to pursue studies that included her ethnicity, to give back through community service, and

to explore her own culture. All four of these young people noted examples of how they have participated in service projects in high school. Shandra revived her school's IBBO (International Baccalaureate Black Organization) and started a support group for students to help them graduate from high school. Morgan brought fellow Black high school students back to her gifted program to mentor students. "You could just see these kids smile from a mile away. It was the best feeling ever, just knowing that they are having somebody in high school that they can look up to." Unfortunately, she reported that several years into her mentoring program, there were few students of color being mentored. Chauncey served as a peer counselor and, at the time of his interviews, Malik was asked to be a peer mentor.

All of the study participants described being held to high academic and behavioral standards in their gifted programs, and engaged in educational experiences that were beyond what their peers in regular programs were receiving. Although underachievement in gifted Black students is often chosen as an alternative to racelessness, social rejection, and cultural isolation (Ford, 1996), each of these young people was strong enough and motivated enough to "tough it out" and succeed academically. Branch (1994) maintains that a student's self-efficacy, the attitudes that individuals hold about their capacity to impact outcomes in their lives, is highly correlated to learning and achievement. Each of these remarkable young people possessed enough self-efficacy to see themselves attending and graduating from high school and college, and being successful in life. Two participants wish to pursue theater careers, one is interested in accounting and marketing,

and the fourth is “hoping to do art and sociology as a combined major,” using “art for social change,” bringing “the arts back into . . . [the] healing process.”

Despite the benefits of gifted programming, each individual also noted the costs. All of the study’s participants described feeling that they were the only Black student in his or her program or feeling like one of a few Black students enrolled. Like young people in other studies (Harmon, 2002; Hertzog, 2003; Horvat & Antonio, 1999), each expressed some frustration about being separate from students of similar cultural backgrounds. However, nearly all of the participants felt an integral part of the program in which he or she was enrolled, most making friends with minority and/or majority culture classmates. Malik expressed the most negative feelings about his programs, seemingly from switching programs repeatedly, feeling underserved as a gifted student, and encountering peer pressure, racism, and injustice. Malik also noted the most adverse reaction (of all of the study’s participants) when he cited that he had not been able to fit in easily with either White classmates or Black classmates. He framed his impressions of gifted programming as “not bad,” but as “a source of just bad stuff.” He perceived his programs as not being “the complete cause of it, but me being in these programs has been a cause of me not fitting in completely with either group.”

Other detriments of gifted programming that were cited included being asked to provide “the Black perspective,” in class, receiving assessment labels (ie: novice, proficient) instead of letter grades, and being asked to represent the program for marketing purposes. Peer pressure to act Black was mentioned, although this stress was less in the early grades, becoming more pronounced in high school when participants

were exposed to more Black classmates. Malik, however, experienced the opposite reality, where the pressure to conform to the Black stereotype was greater in his culturally diverse elementary and middle schools. Several of the young people in the study noted that had they attended a culturally diverse middle school, their transition into high school would have been easier. Morgan noted, “I wouldn’t have dealt with some of the more racial issues . . . or my kind of acceptance in that case. I probably would have had friends to begin with.” Given Malik’s experience (as well as the high school experiences of all of the participants), it would appear that being gifted in a culturally diverse school does not guarantee acceptance by Black peers, especially if one has been enrolled in a predominantly White gifted program and/or chooses to be high achieving.

In their study, Horvat and Antonio (1999) described how high school students felt forced to change their speech patterns, musical and clothing preferences, and racial affiliation in order to coexist in a school environment that was mostly White. This phenomenon was evident throughout each participant’s story. Chauncey clearly noted that his norm was acting differently around different people.

I realized . . . when you’re around White people, you have to be different. And when you’re around your own people, you’re going to be different. As long as you recognize that, and you don’t see it as a negative thing, and you realize that it’s just because I’m in that environment that I have to be different, then you’re good.

When Shandra was in gifted programming, she recalled, “I tried to talk different and what not . . . to be more comfortable.” She told her White friends, “I act like you guys.” But she was quick to note that she could easily “pull [more stereotypical Black behaviors] out, too.” When Shandra began high school, she struggled to fit in with Black classmates.

“Being around more Black kids, I have definitely added that to the overall me.” Now she sees herself adjusting to whatever world she finds herself in. “A lot of people, my friends, have told me that I’m a chameleon, I guess you could say. To me, in a way, they are different worlds.”

As detailed previously, Malik was hesitant to be pigeon holed in either world or in both worlds. When asked if he moved between both worlds, his response seemed to reflect his ambiguity. “Well, actually, sometimes, yeah. No, at all times, I act like me. And ‘me’ is, I guess, that middle ground. But sometimes, I’ll fit in more on either side.” He perceived that “being in these programs has been a cause of me not fitting in completely with either group.” In her two worlds, Morgan saw herself communicating differently. “And now I know how to communicate within the worlds, and comfortably. I can do it now confidently as well and not lose myself. And I do juggle them.”

When recalling their elementary and/or middle school years in gifted programming, the young people interviewed for this study focused on the challenges that they faced as students who were both gifted and Black. People who were supportive and encouraging were also highlighted. The pros and cons of being in gifted programming were detailed, with all young people feeling that the benefits outweighed the costs. However, in the overall examination of the comments of these young people, the following themes consistently surfaced – adversity, resilience, and acceptance – and appeared to define their experiences in gifted programming.

Evaluation Through Thematics

Introduction

As all of these young people have already detailed, they perceived problematic dilemmas with few satisfying choices. They sought to adjust to the ramifications and consequences of the choices they made, coping with social and racial dilemmas of both internal and external varieties. Because of the added stress of ethnic acceptance or rejection, the development and embodiment of Black racial identity, the dearth of community support and educational connections, and the tension of cultural duality, these young people experienced gifted education differently from their White classmates. Throughout their stories can be heard the need to find acceptance, relevance, and a sense of balance between the two cultures in which they found themselves.

Adversity

By attending predominantly White gifted programs, each of the young people interviewed for this study felt isolated from the Black community at school and most expressed (some directly, some indirectly) a need for more diversity in their programs. Each craved a healthy affiliation with their cultural group, but experienced little. However, upon closer examination, those that attended programs in predominantly White settings confronted less peer pressure to conform to Black stereotypical behaviors. This is significant given the forced choice described by Fordham (1988) to either affiliate with the Black community or to achieve academically. Although Rowley and Moore (2002) found that Black students in predominantly White schools experience the most peer pressure to underachieve and endure the highest social costs when they do achieve, I

noted that the pressure of making a choice between affiliation and achievement was postponed until participants were in a more integrated setting. Being in a predominantly White school appeared to allow these young people an opportunity to achieve academically with little pressure from Black peers. “The White ones were the ones who were not reacting.” This is also due to the distance that these young people had from the Black community, and the support from their families and others (such as church members) to achieve. The participant in this study who endured the most peer pressure within the years enrolled in gifted programming was Malik who attended several gifted programs housed in more culturally diverse settings. Rowley and Moore (2002) found that children in more integrated schools are more aware of racial differences, and that certainly was the case with Malik. I would submit that he experienced the most peer pressure due to his proximity to Black classmates that were threatened by his non-stereotypical behaviors, including his interest in academic success.

Another adverse reaction that these young people endured was the perception of themselves as less academically able than their gifted peers. As none of the participants detailed culturally responsive teaching practices and/or materials, and two of these young people experienced individualized or small group instruction, I suggest that the lack of culturally responsive techniques - teaching to cultural styles and preferences - was a factor in furthering feelings of inadequacy, ironic given these students’ participation in gifted programming. A further irony was that once in high school, all of these young people described themselves as academically capable and successful. While it might be

tempting to assume they were comparing themselves to average classmates in traditional high school classes, they were not. Each took IB, Honors, Accelerated, and/or AP classes.

Besides feeling dissimilar academically and racially from their classmates, these young people reported that they also felt different from their peers in other ways. One felt inferior economically; uncomfortable inviting friends over, lest they should see that she lived differently than they did. Two of these young people expressed that they felt physically distinctive; taller than their classmates. While these discrepancies are unavoidable and typical to the angst that young people go through while growing up, I suggest that such distinctions are compounded when Black gifted children and teens already stand out from their classmates racially and intellectually. Despite the potential for contributing to social and emotional problems, these discrepancies appeared to challenge these resilient individuals to purposefully use such diversity to their advantage. Two students were involved in drama and theater, while others pushed themselves to be outgoing socially. Several excelled in athletics, dance, and cheerleading. Each gave back to others in some meaningful way. All were proud of their academic achievements, despite several feeling less able than White classmates at differing points in their schooling.

As noted, Chauncey assumed a colorblind stance. “I can honestly tell you that I didn’t see color.” This approach is widespread in schools, and has been espoused as a way to treat all people fairly, regardless of race and ethnicity (Schofield, 2001). However, such an approach ignores not only color, but also rich cultural contributions and notable cultural differences. Further, this philosophy assumes that all groups will conform to the

standards of the dominant culture, which could lead to a loss of the unique traditions and talents that each culture brings to our nation (Ford & Harris, 1999). When viewing Chauncey's colorblindness and racelessness, I suggest that those most influential to him, his family and his school, encouraged and legitimized a similar perspective, which he adopted to both his surroundings and to himself within that context.

For most of the other gifted programs highlighted in this study, evidence or a lack of evidence points to a colorblind approach, emanating from the commonly held, but flawed, notion that recognizing race equates to racism (Ford & Harris, 1999). Schofield (2001) suggests that ignoring cultural differences denotes race as "a social category of no relevance" (p. 252), where people operate as though they are oblivious to race and where race is treated as a taboo topic. Such a perspective may minimize discomfort in social situations, but it has been found that people generally use race as a category through which to perceive and react to others (Schofield). Thus, colorblindness on the part of schools and teachers diminishes the opportunities to examine and confront issues of inequity, interpersonal conflict, institutional and personal racism, cultural differences in students, and culturally responsive practices and materials. Navigating a colorblind society while being Black, yet wanting to be perceived as distinctive was a quandary that each of these young people experienced and voiced throughout their narratives. Malik described his individualism, "We are what we are. Malik is a classification. That's what I am. Malik is the classification."

Given the complexity of this conundrum, it is no wonder that maintaining a positive identity is another challenge faced by gifted Black students. Burke (1991)

suggests that the identity process can be thought of as a continuous and self-adjusting feedback loop. Behaviors are adjusted to reduce incongruities between one's own identity and the identity defined by society, such as those defined by the Black community. A source of stress in the identity process occurs when there is "a negative connection between . . . two (or more) identities such that increasing the congruence with respect to one identity, decreases the congruence for the other" (p. 842). Within their own set of life experiences, each of these young people had their race denied or denigrated by peers, a negative connection, although they all expressed a sense of pride in being Black, a positive congruence. All of these young people expressed a need to affiliate with other Blacks, but described some disassociation and distance from the Black stereotype, and hence the Black community at large. Following Burke's logic, the racism, denigration, and incongruence experienced by these young people decreased their ability to maintain a positive self-identity and increased stress and anxiety. Both learning and self-concept may be affected (Ford & Harris, 1999), and students can feel "irrelevant and expendable" (Gay, 2000, p. 117).

I suggest that this incongruence and dissonance resulted in these young people seeking individual friends, not necessarily based upon cultural affiliation, but upon like mindedness and upon acceptance. While this might seem obvious, what isn't obvious is that, for each, the search was arduous, and in one case, life threatening. Throughout high school, each made and lost friends, both Black and White. Although all of them spoke of eventually making and keeping both Black and White friends, three of them noted that he or she had one specific friend, a Black friend, with whom he or she could discuss racial

issues and dilemmas. This is significant as it points to the need for a large enough group of racial peers from which to find and make such a unique friend, usually absent in a predominantly White school environment.

While all of the participants felt the need to affiliate with Black peers, they also valued being accepted in the White world, and tried to find ways to bridge these two cultures. This will be discussed in the following section entitled *Acceptance*.

Once these young people left their gifted programs and entered high school, each experienced challenging transitions. Those that had delayed the forced choice between social acceptance with Black friends or academic success without them, now confronted the dilemma head-on. Some were painfully aware of this struggle, while one person chose to avoid it through his colorblind stance. No matter the reaction to this choice, these young people felt peer pressure to assume characteristics of the Black culture. Both Black and White classmates accused them of acting White – engaging in behaviors, attitudes, and/or activities that are associated with the White culture. Each acknowledged the negative stereotypes of acting Black, such as using nonstandard English, playing only “Black” sports, downplaying or negating academic prowess, wearing certain styles of clothing, and/or hanging out with Black friends exclusively. Many endured racial jokes, and several admitted telling them.

The challenges faced by these young people should not and cannot be discounted. While elementary and intermediate grades are often remembered fondly, most of these participants used words that revealed a more harsh reality. While one “toughed it out,” another felt, “You have to sometimes battle through it.” Another fought his peers

physically and negative stereotypes figuratively. To cope with this degree of adversity, especially as children and teens, these young people found support, strength, and guidance from significant others in their lives. These issues will be discussed next.

Resilience

Although the literature on resilience in gifted Black children and teens has been sparse, it is clear that each of the young people in this study displayed resilience in dealing with the scope and level of adversity in their lives. Kitano (2003) maintains that “resilience is not an immutable trait but an acquired response . . . encouraged by a supportive environment” (p.167). In this section, I examine elements within the environments of these young people to understand how they coped with the adversity in their lives.

All of the young people noted the key role that their parents played in their lives. For those participants who were raised by single mothers, each recognized them, while several pointed out the challenges of single parenthood. All of the parents held high academic and behavioral expectations for their children, sought programs to serve the gifted needs of their children, and supported their children’s educational pursuits. In addition, their children revealed that they had positive relationships with at least one parent, and had dreams and goals, signifying hope for their futures. Several participants noted that there was someone at home to help them academically. Thus, each young person mentioned support systems at home that are known to foster school success (Clark, 1983; Ford & Harris, 1999).

The importance of positive cultural role models was crucial for each of the young people highlighted in this study. However, with the exception of Morgan who recalled one teacher who served as a gatekeeper to her African-American heritage, no one else mentioned Black role models outside of their families. This appears to be due to the dearth of Black adults in their educational programs, points to the ongoing challenge of attracting significant numbers of culturally diverse candidates to the teaching field (Ford & Harris, 1999), and illuminates the disconnect between the Black community and schools.

Caring teachers were also part of each young person's support system. Although there was little evidence from the interviews that the teachers within these gifted programs purposefully utilized varied culturally practices and materials, the teachers that were remembered with fondness did maintain caring relationships with the participants. According to Gay (2000), "Caring is one of the major pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy" (p. 45). Caring, as recalled by these young people, took the form of high expectations, concern for them as students and as people, reciprocal and respectful relationships, and relationships that extended beyond the classroom. For Morgan, her caring teachers were responsive to her cultural needs, expanded her cultural boundaries, taught her within a cultural context, and included social justice as part of her curriculum. As noted previously, caring relationships with teachers eased both Morgan and Shandra through traumatic incidents in their lives.

Noticeably absent from the experiences of these young people were counseling services provided by their respective gifted programs. Such services are often lacking for

all gifted students, regardless of their race or culture. But given the depth, complexity, and variety of challenges faced by gifted Black students, it would seem prudent for programs and schools to consider counseling services for all of their students, with specific expertise in counseling for Black students. Although Henfield (2006) found that even when those support services were provided, gifted African-American students had negative perceptions of school counselors and tended not to elicit such assistance, administrators of gifted programs can use the recommendations of researchers (Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004; Ford & Harris, 1999; Kopala, 2000) to develop support services that meet the complex needs of gifted Black students.

A few participants in this study sought solace in spirituality, while most found a cultural foundation in their churches. Church experiences were observed to help these young people anchor themselves in the Black culture and find affiliation with other Black youth, since all attended predominantly White programs and some had limited contact with other Black youth. "The friends I had at church, those were the only other Black friends that I had." Church was a place to learn what being Black was all about, but also to be encouraged to be successful in school. As for Shandra and Chauncey, the Black church can help young people avoid the forced choice of being culturally affiliated or being academically successful, by supporting their young members to strive for both and by providing a safe haven to be accepted for both. Other community-based organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA/YWCA have been called upon to provide sanctuary and positive role models for gifted Black children (Ford, Grantham, &

Milner, 2004; Ford & Harris, 1999; Hale, 2001; Torrance et al., 1998). However, none of this study's participants noted involvement in organizations such as these.

While the significance of the family and role models remains paramount, the importance of friends as a support system cannot be discounted. However, making friends is complicated by factors of racial identity, group affiliation, and school achievement. These young people adjusted to being and feeling different by making White friends and seeking other Black or biracial classmates if they attended their programs. Unconsciously, each assumed a raceless identity, choosing to excel academically and identify with the mores of the dominant society. High school transitions were times of high hopes and demanding adjustments, as each tried to affiliate with cultural peers and maintain relationships with White friends. All of these young people continued to excel academically, experiencing social costs as they encountered classmates who felt threatened by their non-stereotypical choices and behaviors.

Rowley and Moore (2002) suggest that children who attend integrated schools are more aware of racial differences, but also are more likely to have culturally diverse friends, and to like children from differing ethnic backgrounds. They also maintain that Black children are more positive about academic success when in mixed race schools. While Malik was more aware of racial differences in his integrated middle schools, he also struggled to fit in because of his enrollment in predominantly White gifted programs and his choice to identify with and strive for academic success. He was positive about his academic standing, although it cost him socially. Evidence from the stories of all of the participants leads back to increased identification and enrollment of Black students in

gifted programs. As noted, this would provide Black students with true peers, young people who are both Black and gifted, and a genuine sense of acceptance and belonging.

Acceptance

During their years of gifted programming, each young person found ways to maneuver an educational system that was predominantly White. They all found varying levels of acceptance from teachers and friends, although some struggled more than others with both types of relationships. Each made friends within their gifted programs; some were characterized as life long, while other relationships were fleeting. The young ladies expressed satisfaction with long-term relationships. The friends they made, of both races, appeared to pass in and out of their lives, but each knew that these would be life long relationships. Both young men also mentioned friends of both races. One had the most trouble experiencing a sense of acceptance with peers of either race, while the other had only White friends during his years in gifted programming.

As these compelling young people progressed through high school, each grappled with finding acceptance and approval. Most sought affiliation with other Blacks, but struggled to balance their motivation to achieve with the need to have Black friends. One chose to stay completely within the comfort zone of racelessness, while the others assumed varying levels of racelessness in order to maintain high academic standings. All managed in their own personal ways, and each of them expressed the desire to be seen as a unique individual, not as a category or a stereotype. They each sought close friends or family members with which to discuss issues of race. Most learned to “code switch” (Ford, 1994, p.84) adjusting their mannerisms to each situation and encounter. They all

acknowledged some biculturalism; moving purposefully between the two cultures. Each mentioned ways to give back to society, especially to other culturally diverse individuals who needed support. They all had plans for higher education, and goals for careers that would bring them success and personal satisfaction.

As much as it is tempting to report that each of these young people achieved a complete sense of acceptance, it would be inaccurate. Each continued on his or her own journey towards finding approval and balance, both personal and societal. One was examining the implications of being Black, while another was looking for friends that straddled both races. One wanted to immerse herself in her race by attending a historically Black college, while the last individual wanted diversity and purposefully chose a college that would provide it.

I picked a small school. It is not a historically Black college by any means, but it is 30% African-American. Now, I did that on purpose because I knew I wanted diversity. I made that a clear focus. I didn't want an all White school. I didn't want an all Black school. I didn't want an all Hispanic school. I didn't want all of anything. I wanted a mixture of people.

While each of these young people began the journey toward acceptance and navigated the path somewhat differently, they all sought membership in both the Black and the White worlds. They represent the 20% of gifted Black learners – the ones that are motivated to achieve in school. Morgan tried to articulate the need to understand why and how gifted Black students choose the path they do.

I hate to keep talking about [my twin brother] and I, but we are the key to seeing how . . . growing up the same way, being different people is what changed it and made our experiences different, because we both deal with things differently. It depends on the individual, completely; there's no doubt.

Her brother's story reminds us of the need for continued research into the underachievement of gifted Black students.

Summary

While the literature is filled with the challenges that gifted learners confront, the participants in this study helped to illuminate the intense and complex trials and tribulations faced by those students who are Black and gifted. Ford (1996) suggests that gifted Black students are especially impacted because of their keen perceptiveness and acute sensitivity. Although each participant confronted dilemmas related to being gifted, challenges related to race and its intersection with achievement were by far the most problematic. Their stories reveal great efforts to achieve and maintain individual identities through personal resilience, strong support systems, and genuine relationships.

Question Four: What implications do these experiences hold for gifted education and the education of gifted African-American students?

During each interview, the young person telling his or her story was asked what advice he or she would give to former teachers or to those who make decisions about gifted programming. Their insights and advice are combined with essential features that emerged from the interpretation and evaluation of their stories to produce implications which could hold significance for those who work with and advocate for gifted African-American students and/or make policies that guide gifted programming. When examining these implications, additional themes emerged. Within these themes, recommendations are organized as related to advocacy, awareness and acknowledgement, and support.

Advocacy

The importance of advocacy for gifted African-American students begins with culturally appropriate identification and assessment methods, and with mandates that the number of Black student in gifted programs reflect the ethnic makeup of the communities in which they live. If 80% of gifted Black students underachieve as suggested by Ford (1992), then criteria for admission to gifted programs must remove the stipulations that insist upon preexisting motivation and achievement. Quality gifted programs are charged with the responsibility to motivate students through culturally responsive practices and materials, not exclude them because they haven't had appropriate opportunities to engage and achieve. A focus on talent development strategies could also increase the number of Black students served. While this is no small task, strategies have already been researched, suggested, and implemented that reverse the under-representation of Black students in gifted programs (Ford, 1996).

Recruiting Black students requires an awareness of Fordham's (1988) principles of fictive kinship. Understanding that achievement for some Black families equates to rejecting the Black community, program administrators could work with Black families to see the benefits, while openly acknowledging the costs, of gifted education. This also involves trust from families that administrators are working to increase the enrollment of Black students and to include culturally responsive practices and materials. Cultural responsiveness goes beyond the heroes and holidays level of multicultural education, and families need to see the advanced stages of Banks' (2001) multicultural education firmly integrated into a school's curriculum. Further, seeing culturally diverse, professional staff

members demonstrates that the school or program has a true commitment to diversity. Hiring Black teachers and counselors can significantly affect how Black families perceive gifted programs and their commitment to educating all students. Gifted programs might also work with local colleges to support and recruit culturally diverse teacher education and counseling students, including providing students with student teaching and clinical internship opportunities.

A genuine commitment to diversity includes financial assistance for those families that cannot afford tuition-based gifted programs. All programs might consider how students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds may compare themselves to classmates perceived to be wealthier and what emotions such perceptions might elicit. Educators might consider their students' economic status throughout the year as field trips, fundraisers, lunch programs, snack time, and other events involving money arise.

Once gifted programs are able to establish a core of enrolled Black families, recruiting other Black families will likely be easier. Black families already enrolled may hold the key to attracting more students of color. Eliciting advice from families regarding how to attract and keep new students and their parents can provide strategies never before considered and/or implemented. Involving Black families in this way may also build a sense of ownership toward the program that will ensure longevity of enrollment of diverse students and greater depth of parent participation. Recognizing that differences may exist between families that are more assimilated into the dominant culture and those that are more affiliated with the Black culture is also important for administration to

acknowledge. Morgan provided her insight and advice regarding the recruitment of Black gifted students.

I'm not too sure what they're [gifted programs] doing. But clearly something's not working. So, I mean, I don't know what their strategies are. I know they're losing people, and they're losing them fast. And they're having a hard time holding on to people, which would give me a red flag that something needed to be addressed or approached differently, I guess. I would first start trying to recruit people and [provide] encouragement. And then build communities within that to support, where once you build a certain number of students and their families give them the support of each other, as well as encouragement.

Morgan notes that parents, such as her mother, would make excellent support systems because they have been through the system and know how to navigate it successfully.

(For a detailed treatment on the challenges of Black parents negotiating private schools for gifted students, see Hale, 2001.)

In telling her own story, Hale (2001) maintains that schools must see themselves as allies with parents in raising and educating their children. "I have been appalled by the extent to which members of the helping professions have functioned in an adversarial or competitive mode with me in raising my child, when we should have been functioning as a partnership" (p. 53). Schools can recognize that Black parents are advocating for their children, perhaps in ways different from White parents, and that schools can ask how to assist them in their efforts. For those families that do not appear to have the skills or means, schools can work with them to understand and use the educational system to further support their children.

Understanding and respecting the Black family is the first step in examining parent involvement strategies for schools and programs. Another is appreciating and building from the assets of young people and their families, rather than operating from a

deficit model. Working from an asset model looks at the whole child in the context of a family or a community, allows for healthy human development, and acknowledges and builds from the strengths that children and families already possess (Benson, 1997).

Awareness and Acknowledgement

For the majority of teachers and administrators (whose demographic composition tends to be mono-cultural: White, female, middle class, highly educated, mono-linguistic, and suburban), advocating for their culturally different students involves training to recognize and appreciate the intricacies of working with students who are both gifted and Black. However, research points to the inadequate training available to guide teachers to work with either population of students – Black or gifted. Few teacher education and/or staff development opportunities are available to prepare teachers to work with those students who are both gifted and Black (Bonner, 2000; Ford, 1995; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Gay 2002; Haberman, 1996; Larke, 1990; Lin Goodwin, 1997; Rhodes, 1992; Sleeter, 2001; Zeichner, 1993). Administrators can research and initiate staff development opportunities to help their teachers experience the personal transformations necessary to confront their own identities, become learners of their students, identify with their students, become multicultural, challenge racism and other biases, and develop ongoing, critical learning communities (Nieto, 1999).

One such transformation occurs when White educators move beyond the colorblind approach, and acknowledge and validate their students' differences (Ford & Harris, 1999; Schofield, 2001). This approach is marked by open and ongoing dialogues among educators in order to examine and confront issues of inequity, interpersonal

conflict, institutional and personal racism, cultural differences in students, and culturally responsive practices and materials. Black students also desire and deserve that same type of open and honest dialogue with their teachers and within their classrooms. Malik noted, “They need to acknowledge that there are . . . differences in race. There’s differences in cultures and differences of background.” Recognition of student differences translates to an acceptance of individual culture, personal identity, and self-worth.

To accept and support these individual differences is to be aware of the depth and magnitude of the challenges faced by high achieving Black students. Foremost in this set of personal dilemmas is the enormous choice that students confront in deciding between social acceptance and academic success. Acknowledging this forced choice could provide educators with a deeper insight into issues related to underachievement, peer pressure, social acceptance/rejection, behavioral issues, and cultural affiliation. Black students who do underachieve may appear to “not belong” in gifted programs. Insight into the underlying causes and issues related to underachievement allows educators to address the complexities of underachievement with insight and sensitivity, and to determine whether individual student needs can be addressed within specific programs. An understanding of the development of racial identity can provide teachers with greater expertise as they examine, with deeper acumen, how the stages might impact all aspects of the classroom, such as social dynamics, culturally relevant curriculum, diverse learning styles, behavior and discipline, and so on.

To help Black students who have not bought into the educational system, educators can begin to understand that Blacks have to believe that schooling and

education, a feature of the dominant society, is worth the struggle. Many Black students, especially males, look to sports and music, and in fewer cases, to illegal activities (such as drugs) to find a sense of success. “There is . . . evidence that many Black males view sports or music as more promising routes to upward mobility than academic pursuits” (Noguera, 2003, p. 438). To improve the academic achievement of Black students, educators can develop an awareness and understanding of the underlying attitudes that affect how some Black students perceive the educational system and their place within it. While this would require understanding a differing belief system, as well as great effort, the potential benefits could impact a large number of disenfranchised young people.

While many educators are well versed in multiple intelligences and other principles and theories of brain-based learning, few, as observed in this study, recognize and differentiate for the learning styles and preferences of Black students. Understanding these differences can impact the learning environment for all students. Although Shandra sought a communal learning environment, she was separated from her friends for talking. She noted that year after year, she was admonished for her expressiveness, except while on stage. She was placed in a small math group, geared to help low achieving students. Unfortunately, three of those six students were Black, and their teacher was unaware of how to use their learning preferences and styles to advance their learning. Malik’s behavior with a friend was interpreted and treated as bullying, even though the friend told the teacher and administrators that they were innocently and mutually fooling around. With her own son, Hale (2001) felt that teachers did not understand his need for movement and his expressiveness. She suggests that teachers “need training in

identifying the social context for misbehavior” (p. 63). Gay (2000) suggests that teachers adopt culturally responsive practices, while teaching culturally diverse students how to negotiate school as a system. Schools and programs serving gifted students can create learning environments that promote ongoing opportunities for students to express their uniqueness through cultural traits such as those detailed by Boykin (1994). Beyond what can be implemented in the classroom, gifted programs can offer extra curricular activities, such as dance, drama, debate, speech, and other venues through which Black students can express their individualism, as well as their cultural pride.

As noted, Black students operate from a position of close relationships with others, including their teachers. Appreciating that Black students tend to place a high level of importance on the people in the classroom, particularly the teacher, opens up opportunities to engage students through warm and caring relationships. “The heart of the educational process is the interactions that occur between teachers and students” (Gay, 2000, p. 46-47). With culturally responsive teachers, these relationships may be intense, might help students connect their rich traditions to their learning, and can certainly provide encouragement and support to navigate the challenges and choices inherent to being both Black and gifted. While these suggestions might appear simplistic, such caring relationships have the potential to facilitate the development of positive racial identity, perhaps avoiding the assumption of a raceless persona.

Educators can help Black students to avoid such racelessness and to perceive success as inherent to all cultures, including their own. “If young people are exposed to images of African-American academic achievement in their early years, they won’t have

to define school achievement as something for Whites only” (Tatum, 1997, p. 65). Tatum cites a long and rich history of Black intellectual achievement. (For a detailed account of the history of the African-American philosophy of education, see Perry, 2003.) Numerous accounts of the theory and/or the practice of multiculturalism are available to help educators embark on the transformative journey toward culturally responsive teaching (Banks, 2001, 2003; Brown & Kysilka, 2002; Ford, 2004; Gay, 2000; Grant, & Sleeter, 2003; Hale, 2001; Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 2002; Nieto, 1999; Shade, & New, 1993 to cite a few).

Although students want their cultures to be acknowledged and integrated into the fabric of the classroom, they do not want to be singled out or called upon to be experts on their race. Morgan was emphatic when she noted, “‘Give us the Black perspective.’ I hate that question. I mean, I don’t know the whole world’s perspective, or all of the Black population’s perspective.” Teachers could become students of their students, realizing that each Black student and each Black family is unique and distinctive. Some students, such as Morgan, may not have extensive ties to the Black community, and hence, do not feel as connected to the Black perspective. On the other hand, other families, such as Shandra’s, may have strong ties to the Black community. Still other families, such as Malik’s, may have connections to the Black community, but may maintain some distance from those behaviors and attitudes that form the basis of negative stereotypes.

Black families may have different reasons for enrolling their children in tuition-based programs than White families. Although all families choose private education for a high quality, rigorous academic education and the opportunities that come from a strong

educational foundation, Black families make this choice because they perceive other avenues for success to be closed for them. Thus, Black parents may be more demanding, expecting the most for their money “because the money for tuition generally comes harder” (Hale, 2001, p. 70). Black parents may find it hard to assimilate into a predominantly White parent body, especially if they feel, as their children do, a need for cultural affiliation. Further, the notion of parent involvement may take on a different meaning for some families from different cultural and socioeconomic realities. Black families may need to be specifically invited before they feel welcome and comfortable enough to volunteer within and/or for predominantly White programs and schools.

The significant role that families and extended families play as sources of encouragement and strength for gifted Black students is critical for educators to note and appreciate. The manner in which this support is internalized may be unique to each child. This is illustrated in Morgan’s family where she and her twin brother each chose a different path. While Morgan chose to be academically successful, her brother chose to glorify his Blackness through a rejection of behaviors associated with the dominant society and a display of behaviors that are more stereotypically Black.

It went a different way for him. He went to extremes, like how to be this gangster thug. I’m sitting here, like, “Dude, you live in this house. Look at where you’re living. You are no gangster. You’re no thug. Sit down.” He still is struggling with that, like he doesn’t live here anymore because he fought so hard. And my mom was finally like, “You know what? Go do what you’re going to do, because this isn’t what or who you are.” You know, like, “It might be but you’re trying to be something you’re not.” And now he lives in this world that I don’t really understand or know.

I highlight this example to point out the risks of prejudging and misjudging Black families, especially those whose children go down a path foreign to those of us who are mono-cultural.

Understanding Black families means understanding and honoring sibling relationships. Often, older siblings are responsible for watching over younger siblings, especially when in predominantly White settings. Allowing older brothers and sisters to be released from class to touch base with siblings, and dismissing siblings at the same time at the end of the school day signals to families a cultural appreciation and responsiveness on the part of the educational system, and allows Black students and their parents to feel more at ease with their program choices if they are attending predominantly White programs.

Support

While parents were the strongest support system for the young people in this study, schools have the unique opportunity to share in that responsibility and provide culturally relevant support services for gifted Black students. This seems prudent given the multitude of challenges these young people face and that have been detailed throughout this study.

In view of the social isolation that gifted Black students experience in primarily White programs, schools can support students in their efforts to affiliate with other Black students. Students are often grouped to promote communal learning and peer support, but care must be taken to teach responsibly, using culturally responsive pedagogy and materials. Black students from both gifted and traditional programs could be brought

together to find areas of commonality and to break down the accusations of acting Black and acting White. Predominantly White schools might collaborate to bring their culturally diverse students together and encourage support groups, friendships, and social gatherings. One of the school districts attended by a study participant sponsors an annual leadership conference for Black families and teens that offers prominent speakers (the keynote speaker selected by the students), a career fair, and entertainment by local Black performers.

Morgan suggested developing mentoring programs, like the one she created, where Black, high achieving high school students meet with gifted Black students in the elementary and middle school grades.

It was the best feeling ever, just knowing that they are having somebody in high school that they can look up to. They're going to get there. Look at us. We are doing fine. Especially me . . . a lot of the kids connected to me, because I'd be like, "I went here, too. Look at me now. I'm cool. I'm doing things with my life. I'm not struggling."

She noted that if she had had a similar opportunity herself, "It could have made a world of difference to me. I would have been more confident at least . . . knowing that I could make it to the next level." Similarly, Shandra wanted to create a support group after attending a predominantly White IB program, while trying to maintain her social standing within the larger Black community. Malik was asked to tutor his peers that were lower achieving, but was never supported in breaking down the social barriers that existed between him and these same classmates.

Chauncey suggested that gifted programs and schools, especially those that are predominantly White, could provide an advocacy office or clubs for different cultures.

“Being at a predominantly White school . . . it’s a good feeling to know that you have an advocacy office of Black, Asian, and stuff like that, that you can go to when you want to be around people like yourself.” He noted that having an office or a club could be a more permanent fixture, “so that if the kids aren’t already feeling connected, you definitely have that office that’s there the entire school year, not during just February or Chinese New Year, that’s promoting your culture.”

Since all of the young people interviewed described feelings of academic inadequacy or inferiority at some point in their school careers, gifted programs could examine closely the methods and materials used to teach students who are having trouble maintaining a level of academic proficiency equal to their peers. First and foremost, teaching strategies could be aligned to student learning styles, as well as the implementation of broader culturally responsive practices and materials. If and when remediation is truly needed, open and frank discussions regarding any learning challenges could be held with each student and appropriate instruction could be implemented.

The importance of mentors and role models for gifted culturally diverse students has been noted by numerous researchers (Ford, Grantham, & Milner, 2004; Ford & Harris, 1999; Hale, 2001; Torrance et al., 1998). However, only Morgan mentioned a role model within her gifted program. Schools could work with community partners and community-based organizations, such as 100 Black Men, to provide students with mentors and role models. Chauncey discussed, at length, the responsibility of the media in providing positive examples for Black youth. It was his feeling that the media was more powerful than the educational institution in portraying Black role models. However,

schools can integrate information about successful Blacks, beyond those heroes everyone already knows, throughout the curriculum. “The media definitely has to start highlighting successful Black men and women, just as much as they do White, if not more. It has to be on a regular basis and it’s got to be an overload.”

As noted, none of the young people mentioned counseling services or counselors when asked about support systems in their programs. While such services may be beyond the budget constraints of both public and private programs, I suggest that providing such services is imperative and proactive. This money is well spent if counseling services are well conceived and implemented. It is an investment in talented young people who could otherwise become a statistic – part of the 80% of Black gifted students who are underachieving or not achieving (Ford, 1992). When students don’t reach their potentials, our society as a whole suffers when the talents and contributions of these gifted individuals are lost or misdirected.

For those individuals that have negative perceptions of counselors, Henfield (2006) suggests working through classroom teachers with whom students have a stronger rapport. Further, providing culturally diverse counselors and male counselors might encourage more Black male students to seek counseling rather than perceiving counseling services as for girls with “emotional issues” (p. 131).

The young people in this study observed that their parents provided them with the support to develop strong identities of achievement and to be academically successful against the overwhelming challenges that they faced. Fordham (1988) contends that only Black families can decide what their relationship to the larger society will be and,

therefore, what their academic expectations will be for their children. However, schools can support those families that set high academic standards for their children, so that they can provide more assistance for their children. Programs can empower parents in their efforts to support their children by providing them with information, skills, and resources so they might retain their positions as knowledgeable adults and decision makers. By strengthening the relationship and trust between Black families and gifted programs, parents and teachers can work collaboratively. Schools are then more able to discern if educational decisions are congruent with the family's values, and adjust as needed to maintain respect for the family and its ideals. Parents may need help providing stability and support when their children struggle with peer pressure, social acceptance, and achievement. Family members may need support encouraging their children to embrace academic achievement and to see it as complementary to their family and cultural values.

Schools, whether through counseling services or through knowledgeable classroom teachers, can nurture resilience in gifted Black students. Schools can work to strengthen the working relationship between the family and the gifted program, and include the parents, family, and culture of students in meaningful ways. By providing counseling and Black role models and mentors, schools can enhance the self-esteem of Black students. The inclusion of affective education, multicultural education, knowledge of learning styles and preferences, and effective problem solving skills can also help Black students to develop more resilience (Ford, 1994).

To implement many of the strategies recommended thus far, program staff will likely need ample support. Administrators can conduct a needs assessment, examining

how their programs address underachievement; culturally responsive modifications to policies, curriculum, and pedagogy; social injustice and discrimination; and social/emotional issues, including the development of self-concept and racial identity. Interventions with school personnel could include staff development and ongoing consultation to sensitize staff to create policies and to appreciate, recognize, and apply practices that are culturally responsive, and to restructure curricular content, classroom environments, and the teaching/learning process to respond to the needs of Black gifted students.

Future Research

The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of gifted African-American students who experienced gifted programming, and their discernment of the impact of such programming. While the themes that emerged from the stories of the four highlighted participants hold significance for gifted education and traditional education, there remains much research to be done in order to deepen our understandings even further.

Research might examine the perspective of parents of gifted Black students to determine if and how they supported their children with the development of individual racial identity. One might examine how parents perceived the choice of academic achievement versus identification with the Black community and if and how they supported their children with that dilemma. Did parents encourage their children to see academic achievement as complementary to their African-American values, as an

inherent family value, as a means to financial success, as all of these, or as something else?

Further research might be conducted to address limitations of this study.

Interviewing a larger number of gifted Black students who, like these participants, were high achieving, as well as interviewing gifted Black students who were not high achieving would provide a wider range of perspectives and experiences. Understanding how gifted programming impacted students who were not successful academically would add to educators' abilities to more effectively advocate for and support a segment of students not adequately served. It would be interesting to know how parents viewed the impact of gifted programming on their children, especially for those children who were not academically successful. To ascertain whether the race of the researcher impacted study results, a similar study might be conducted with a Black researcher in order to compare research results.

Rowley and Moore (2002) found that gifted African-American students in predominantly White schools experienced the most peer pressure to underachieve and endured the highest social costs when they did achieve. They suggest that Black students feel more positive about school success when in racially integrated schools. The participants in this study, all of whom attended predominantly White gifted programs, experienced little peer pressure to underachieve. It was only Malik, who attended more integrated schools (that housed his gifted programs), who felt tremendous peer pressure to adopt more stereotypical behaviors and attitudes. This area appears to warrant more research.

Related to that issue is the question of whether attending a predominantly White programs might delay Black students' movement through Cross' (1995) stages of racial identity. More research might be undertaken to ascertain if it is "easier" to be Black and gifted in a predominantly White program, assuming a raceless persona, than being Black and gifted in a more culturally diverse setting. What, then, might be the impact of predominantly Black educational programs and/or predominantly Black gifted programs?

Examining resilience in gifted Black students, and whether it can be enhanced through the systematic development of coping strategies is another area of study that might be pursued. Comparing resiliency in students who are high achieving and those who are underachieving might provide additional insight into the challenges of underachievement. Interviewing parents to discern whether they purposefully nurtured resilience in their children and, if so, what strategies they used, would expand our research on resiliency.

Research into programs that implement Afro-centric and multicultural practices and materials would provide insight into whether such practices encourage students to be both socially accepted and academically successful. Studying teachers who have implemented such practices would provide other educators with insight into how much time, training, financial and administrative support are necessary to truly realize an effective multicultural curriculum.

There remains much work to do if we, as educators, are to open the doors of gifted education up to Black students in an equal and equitable fashion. Issues of persuasive advocacy and fair representation appear to be the first order of business,

supported by a solid foundation of consciousness of and a genuine responsive to cultural issues that may be foreign and unfamiliar to many. All players - including parents, community members, and educators - need assistance and encouragement in order to provide adequate support for Black students. Finally, more voices need to be heard and more perspectives need to be considered through continued research.

A Final Note

During my tenure at a school for gifted children, I was asked to step into a colleague's classroom. This highly respected, veteran teacher was flush with the excitement of discovery and bubbling with enthusiasm. She proceeded to tell me about a Black student in her third grade class, who will be called Demarcus to protect his identity. Although the following words are mostly hers, I provide no citation in order to provide confidentiality to her, as well.

Demarcus had been a student at the school since preschool and had struggled to advance his academic skills and to demonstrate an intellectual grasp of the content. After a reading evaluation, it was determined that he was dyslexic, while also demonstrating difficulty formulating, sequencing, expressing ideas verbally and in writing.

At recess he was a lively, happy child who was able to effectively communicate with his playmates. In the classroom, however, Demarcus was inhibited, fidgety, and distractible. He struggled to attend to discussions and was usually unable to summarize any learning from presentations or talks. His teachers usually needed to repeat directions and work one-on-one with him so that he could understand and/or to complete assignments. As the first year passed, Demarcus did warm to his teachers, and showed

greater willingness to comply with classroom expectations. Even so, his cognitive engagement seemed politely acquiescent.

During the second year in this same classroom, the class studied African-American history through the arts. Visual art was one of Demarcus' strengths, and as the unit unfolded, he began to see that he possessed a relevant means of expressing all that he understood. Initially, the artwork Demarcus created became a conversation point. Classmates knew that Demarcus could draw, but when his artistic talent was tied to an intellectual endeavor, Demarcus was suddenly viewed as incredibly gifted. This was a label that had escaped his grasp because of his disabilities, even though it was a title his unencumbered classmates freely enjoyed.

The awakening didn't end with Demarcus' artistic expression. Connecting with African-American history through the eyes of black artists and leaders was the beginning of holistic transformation. No longer did his teachers need to minimize distractions for Demarcus to attend. No longer did they need to sit one-on-one with him to help him formulate his ideas in writing. He became driven to learn and to work in both his area of weakness and his area of strength. The content was so compelling for him that he would persist through activities that previously seemed too challenging. He started raising his hand and offering thoughts and ideas, which was a behavior that was rarely observed in any of his previous academic years at the school. He connected with the curriculum with vital interest and passion. Suddenly, school was relevant to him!

My colleague relied how the issue of racism was presented in an age appropriate manner as an integral part of her unit on African-American history. It infused every topic

and was illustrated in many of the works and stories of gifted people like Langston Hughes, Jacob Lawrence, the Tuskegee Airmen, and W.C. Handy.

Demarcus' mother came and spoke to the class about her life growing up in the South. She shared some of the discriminatory experiences that she had which were unimaginable to the children. They could hardly believe that someone would treat Demarcus or his mother in such an unkindly way. They shunned the notion of treating others differently because of the color of their skin. At the end of the study, Demarcus' mother thanked the teacher for the unit. She said that this study spared her from having to introduce a disturbing issue to her child. Now the family would have a foundation that emphasized the strength of the African-American spirit upon which to build future discussions about racism.

As I listened to the tale of Demarcus, I found the change in him to be compelling. However, it was the personal and professional transformation of this veteran teacher that most struck me. She ended her story with, "The experience showed me that culturally relevant curriculum is engaging, empowering, enlightening, and, most importantly, essential."

At that moment, how clear it was to me that we cannot expect to transform gifted education to meet the needs of all gifted Black students, without first insisting upon the transformation of their teachers into highly insightful and skilled, culturally responsive educators.

Decades ago, Edmunds (1979), in the quote below, spoke of the inequity within urban schools that serve students of poverty. While his scope might have been broader

than that of this study, 30 years later, issues of inequity still permeate the education of Black students, including and perhaps, most significantly, those that are identified as gifted.

We can, whenever, and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (p. 23)

References

- Allen, B. A., & Boykin, A.W. (1992). African-American children and the educational process: Alleviating cultural discontinuity through prescriptive pedagogy. *School Psychology Review*, 21(4), 586-598. Retrieved October 14, 2005, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Andersen, M. L. (1993). Studying across difference: Race, class, and gender in qualitative research. In J. H. Stanfield & R. M. Dennis (Eds.), *Race and ethnicity in research methods* (pp. 39-52). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Apfelbaum, E., Sommers, S., & Norton, M. (2008). Seeing race and seeming racist? Evaluating strategic colorblindness in social interactions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(4), 918-932.
- Ayers, W. (1990). Small heroes: In and out of school with 10-year-old city kids. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 20(3), 269-278. Retrieved August 23, 2006, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Baldwin, A. Y. (2001, Spring). Understanding the challenge of creativity among African-Americans. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 12(3), 121-125.
- Banks, J. A. (2001). Approaches to multicultural curriculum reform. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (pp. 225-246). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Banks, J. A. (2003). *Teaching strategies for ethnic studies* (seventh ed.). Boston: Pearson Education Group, Inc.
- Benson, P. (1997). *All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Bloom, B. (Ed.) (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives. Handbook I: Cognitive domain*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Bonner, F. A. (2000). African-American giftedness: Our nation's deferred dream. *Journal of Black Studies*, 30(5), 643-663.
- Borland, J. H. (2003). The death of giftedness: Gifted education without gifted children. In J. H. Borland (Ed.), *Rethinking gifted education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Borland, J. H., & Wright, L. (2000). Identifying and educating poor and under-represented gifted students. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Mönks, R. J. Sternberg & R. F. Subotnik (Eds.), *International Handbook of Giftedness and Talent* (2nd ed., pp. 587-594). Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science Ltd.
- Boushel, M. (2000). What kind of people are we? "Race," anti-racism and social welfare research. *British Journal of Social Work*, 30(1), 71-89.
- Boykin, A. W. (1986). The triple quandary and the schooling of Afro-American children. In U. Neisser (Ed.), *The school achievement of minority children* (pp. 57-92). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Boykin, A. W. (1994). Afrocultural expression and its implications for schooling. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 243-256). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Bozzoli, B. (1998). Interviewing the women of Phokeng. In R. Perks & A. Thomson (Eds.), *The oral history reader* (pp. 145-156). London: Routledge.
- Branch, C. W. (1994). Ethnic identity as a variable. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 207-223). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Briggs, C. J., & Reis, S. M. (2004). An introduction to the topic of cultural diversity and giftedness. In *In search of the dream: Designing schools and classrooms that work for high potential students from diverse cultural backgrounds* (pp. 5-32). Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.
- Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. G. (1993). *In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Brown, S. C., & Kysilka, M. L. (2002). *Applying multicultural and global concepts in the classroom and beyond*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bukatko, D., & Daehler, M. W. (1995). *Child development: A thematic approach*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Burke, P. (1991). Identity process and social stress. *American Sociological Review*, 56(6), 836-849. Retrieved July 9, 2008 from JSTOR database.

- Callahan, C. M. (1992). Determining the effectiveness of educational services: Assessment issues. In *Challenges in gifted education: Developing potential and investing in knowledge for the 21st century* (pp. 109-114). Columbus, OH: Ohio State Department of Education. (ERIC Accession No. ED 344416).
- Callahan, C. M. (2005, Spring). Identifying gifted students from underrepresented populations. *Theory into Practice*, 44(2), 98-104.
- Castellano, J. A., & Diaz, E. I. (2002). *Reaching new horizons: Gifted and talented education for culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Clark, B. (1997). *Growing up gifted*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Clark, R. (1983). *Family life and school achievement: Why poor Black children succeed or fail*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cosby, W. H., & Poussaint, A. F. (2007). *Come on, people: On the path from victims to victors*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Cross, Jr., W. E. (1995). The psychology of Nigrescence: Revising the Cross model. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 93-122). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Daniels, V. I. (2002). Maximizing the learning potential of African-American learners with gifts and talents. In F. E. Obiakor & B. A. Ford (Eds.), *Creating successful learning environments for African-American learners with exceptionalities* (pp. 95-105). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience & education*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Dilworth, M. E., & Brown, C. E. (2001). Consider the difference: Teaching and learning in culturally rich schools. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 643-667). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership*, 37(1), 15-24.

- Eisner, E. W. (1998). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Elhoweris, H., Mutua, K., Alsheikh, N., & Holloway, P. (2005, January/February). Effect of children's ethnicity on teachers' referral and recommendation decisions in gifted and talented programs *Remedial and Special Education*, 26(1), 25-31.
- Flowers, L. A., Zhang, Y., III, J. L. M., & Flowers, T. A. (2004). An exploratory phenomenological study of African-American high school students in gifted education programs; Implications for teachers and counselors [Electronic Version]. *E-Journal of Teaching & Learning in Diverse Settings*, 2, 39-53. Retrieved April 7, 2008.
- Ford, D. Y. (1992). Determinants of underachievement as perceived by gifted, above-average, and average Black students. *Roeper Review*, 14(3), 130-136.
- Ford, D. Y. (1994). Nurturing resilience in gifted black youth. *Roeper Review*, 17(2), 80-85.
- Ford, D. Y. (1995, Winter). Desegregating gifted education: A need unmet. *Journal of Negro Education*, 64(1), 52-62.
- Ford, D. Y. (1996). *Reversing underachievement among gifted Black students*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ford, D. Y. (1998). The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education: Problems and promises in recruitment and retention. *The Journal of Special Education*, 32(1), 4-14.
- Ford, D. Y. (2004). Curriculum and instruction for culturally diverse gifted learners. In *In search of the dream: Designing schools and classrooms that work for high potential students from diverse cultural backgrounds* (pp. 65-92). Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children.
- Ford, D. Y., & Grantham, T. C. (2003, Summer). Providing access for culturally diverse gifted students: From deficit to dynamic thinking. *Theory into Practice*, 42(3), 217-225.

- Ford, D. Y., Grantham, T. C., & Milner, H. R. (2004). Underachievement among gifted African-American students: Cultural, social, and psychological considerations. In D. Boothe & J. C. Stanley (Eds.), *Critical issues for diversity in gifted education* (pp. 15-31). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Ford, D. Y., Grantham, T. C., & Whiting, G. W. (2008). Another look at the achievement gap: Learning from the experiences of gifted Black students. *Urban Education*, 43(2), 216-239.
- Ford, D. Y., & Harris, J. J. (1999). *Multicultural gifted education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ford, D. Y., Harris, J. J., Tyson, C. A., & Trotman, M. F. (2002). Beyond deficit thinking: Providing access for gifted African-American students. *Roeper Review*, 24(2), 52-58.
- Ford, D. Y., & Milner, H. R. (2005). *Teaching culturally diverse gifted students*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, Inc.
- Ford, D. Y., & Trotman, M. F. (2001, June). Teachers of gifted students: Suggested multicultural characteristics and competencies. *Roeper Review*, 23(4), 235-239.
- Ford, D. Y., & Whiting, G. W. (2008, April). Presentation for the Building Leadership in the African-American Community for Kids (BLAACK) Conference, Aurora, Colorado.
- Fordham, S. (1988). Racelessness as a factor in Black students' school success: Pragmatic strategy or pyrrhic victory? *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(1), 54-84.
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of 'acting White.'" *The Urban Review*, 18(3), 176-206.
- Foster, M. (1994). Effective Black teachers: A literature review. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 225- 242). Albany: NY: State University of New York Press.
- Gallagher, J. J. (2002). *Society's role in educating gifted students: The role of public policy* (RM02162). Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. Retrieved August 23, 2006 from ERIC database.
- Gallavan, N. (1998). Why aren't teachers using effective multicultural education practices? *Equity & Excellence*, 31(2), 20-27.

- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* New York: Basic Books.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. (2002). Multicultural infusion in teacher education: Foundations and applications. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 72(1), 150-177.
- glbtq, Inc. (2004). *Oral history*. Retrieved April 7, 2006, from glbtq Website: http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/oral_history.html
- Grant, C. A., & Sleeter, C. E. (2003). *Turning on learning: Five approaches for multicultural teaching plans for race, class, gender, and disability*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Grantham, T. C. (2002, Winter). Underrepresentation in gifted education. *Roeper Review*, 24(2), 50-51.
- Grantham, T. C. (2004, Summer). Rocky Jones: Case study of a high achieving Black male's motivation to participate in gifted classes. *Roeper Review*, 26(4), 208-215.
- Grantham, T. C., & Ford, D. Y. (2003). Beyond self-concept and self-esteem: Racial identity and gifted African-American students. *The High School Journal*, 87(1), 18-29.
- Haberman, M. (1996). Electing and preparing culturally competent teachers for urban schools. In J. Sikula, T. J. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed., pp. 747-760). New York: MacMillan.
- Hale, J. E. (2001). *Learning while Black: Creating educational excellence for African-American children*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Markus, H., Steele, C., & Steele, D. (2000). Colorblindness as a barrier to inclusion: Assimilation and nonimmigrant minorities. *Daedalus*, 129(4), 233-259.
- Harmon, D. (2002, Winter). They won't teach me: The voices of gifted African-American inner-city students. *Roeper Review*, 24(2), 68-75.
- Henfield, M. S. (2006). *"I am a rarity in my school:" Hidden obstacles for African-Americans in gifted education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Ohio State University, Columbus.
- Hertzog, N. B. (2003, Spring). Impact of gifted programs from the students' perspective. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 47(2), 131-143.

- Hilliard, A. G. (2003). No mystery: Closing the achievement gap between Africans and excellence. In *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students* (pp. 131-165). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Horvat, E. M., & Antonio, A. L. (1999). "Hey, those shoes are out of uniform:" African-American girls in an elite high school and the importance of habitus. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 30(3), 317-342.
- Janesick, V. J. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design: minuets, improvisations, and crystallization. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 379-400). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- King, J. E. (1994). The purpose of schooling for African-American children. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 25-44). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kirschenbaum, R. J. (1991). An interview with Ernesto M. Bernal and Patricia Hays. *The Gifted Child Today*, 14, 40-46.
- Kopala, M. (2000). Social and emotional characteristics of gifted culturally diverse children. In G. B. Esquivel & J. C. Houtz (Eds.), *Creativity and giftedness in culturally diverse students* (pp. 61-82). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Larke, P. J. (1990). Cultural diversity awareness inventory: Assessing the sensitivity of preservice teachers. *Action in Teacher Education*, 12(3), 23-29.
- Lee, E., Menkart, D., & Okazawa-Rey, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Beyond heroes and holidays; A practical guide to K-12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development*. Washington, DC: Teaching for Change.
- Lin Goodwin, A. (1997). Historical and contemporary perspectives on multicultural teacher education: Past lessons, new directions. In J. E. King, E. R. Hollins, & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for cultural diversity* (pp. 5-22). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Maker, J. (1982a). *Curriculum development for the gifted*. Rockville, MD: Aspen Systems Corporation.

- Maker, J. (1982b). *Teaching models in education of the gifted*. Rockville, MD: Aspen Systems Corporation.
- Mbiti, J. (1990). *African religions and philosophy*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- McNair, J. (n.d.). *Field dependence/independence*. Retrieved June 26, 2008, from Miami Dade College Website: http://faculty.mdc.edu/jmcnair/Joe13pages/field_dependence.htm
- Mears, C. L. (2008). Gateways to understanding: A model for exploring and discerning meaning from experience. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 21(4), 407-425. Retrieved November 18, 2008 from EBSCOhost.
- Mehra, B. (2002, March). Bias in qualitative research: Voices from an online classroom. *The Qualitative Report*, 7(1). Retrieved June 27, 2006 from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR7-1/mehra.html>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE Publications.
- Miller, L. S. (2000). *Minority high academic achievement patterns and their implication for the gifted and talented education community*. Paper prepared for the National Academies' Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education. Washington, DC.
- Milner, H. R., & Ford, D. (2005). Racial experiences influence us as teachers: Implications for gifted education curriculum development and implementation. *Roeper Review*, 28(1), 30-36.
- Mosley Hall, C. J., (1998). The association between racelessness and achievement among African American deaf adolescents. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 143(1), 55-61.
- National Research Council, Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education. (2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nieto, S. (2004). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education Group, Inc.

- Noguera, P. A. (2003). The trouble with Black boys: The role and influence of environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of African-American males. *Urban Education*, 38(4), 431-459.
- Perks, R., & Thomson, A. (1998). Introduction. In R. Perks & A. Thomson (Eds.), *The oral history reader* (pp. ix-xiii). London: Routledge.
- Perry, T. (2003). Up from the parched earth: Toward a theory of African-American achievement. In *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students* (pp. 1-108). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Peshkin, A. (1991). *The color of strangers, the color of friends: The play of ethnicity in school and community*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Piaget, J. (1932). *The moral judgment of the child*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Portelli, A. (1998). What makes oral history different? In R. Perk & A. Thomson (Eds.), *The oral history reader* (pp. 63-74). London: Routledge.
- Renzulli, J. S. (1977). *The enrichment triad model: A guide for developing defensible programs for the gifted and talented*. Wethersfield, CT: Creative Learning Press.
- Renzulli, J. S. (1986). The three-ring conception of giftedness: A developmental model for creative productivity. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness* (pp. 53-92). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Revilla, A., Wells, A., & Holme, J. (2004). "We didn't see color": The salience of color blindness in desegregated schools. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. Pruitt & A. Burns (Eds.), *Off white: Readings on power, privilege, and resistance*. New York: Routledge.
- Reyes-Carrasquillo, A. (2000). The culturally and linguistically diverse school population in the United States. In G. B. Esquivel & J. C. Houtz (Eds.), *Creativity and giftedness in culturally diverse students* (pp. 3-28). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Rhodes, L. (1992). Focusing attention on the individual in identification of gifted Black students. *Roeper Review*, 14(3), 108-110. Retrieved July 5, 2008 from EBSCO Host Research Database.
- Rhodes, P. J. (1994). Race-of-interviewer effects: A brief comment. *Sociology*, 28(2), 547-558.

- Rosenberg, P. (2004). Color blindness in teacher education: An optical illusion. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. Pruitt & A. Burns (Eds.), *Off white: Readings on power, privilege, and resistance*. New York: Routledge.
- Rowley, S. J., & Moore, J. A. (2002, Winter). When who I am impacts how I am represented. *Roeper Review*, 24(2), 63-67.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE Publications.
- Santo, S. (n.d.). *Field independence*. Retrieved June 26, 2008, from University of South Dakota Website: <http://www.usd.edu/~ssanto/field.html>
- Schofield, J. (2001). The colorblind perspective in school: Causes and consequences. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues & perspectives* (4th ed., pp. 247-267). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sellers, R. M., Chavous, T. M., & Cooke, D. Y. (1998). Racial ideology and racial centrality as predictors of African-American college students' academic performance. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 24(1), 8-27.
- Shade, B. J. (1994). Understanding the African-American learner. In E. R. Hollins, J. E. King & W. C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 175-190). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Shade, B. J., & New, C. A. (1993). Cultural influences on learning: Teaching implications. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (pp. 317-331). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Shore, B. M., Cornell, D. G., Robinson, A., & Ward, V. S. (1991). *Recommended practices in gifted education: A critical analysis*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Silverstein, J. (2000). Parents of gifted culturally diverse youngsters. In G. B. Esquivel & J. C. Houtz (Eds.), *Creativity and giftedness in culturally diverse students* (pp. 193-214). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Sleeter, C. (2001). Preparing teachers for culturally diverse school: Research and the overwhelming presence of Whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), 94-106. Retrieved September 24, 2005, from Academic Search Premier database.

- Slocumb, P. (Winter 2001). Giftedness in poverty. *Gifted Education Communicator*, 32(4), 6-11.
- Steele, C. (2003). Stereotype threat and African-American student achievement. In *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African-American students* (pp. 109-130). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1985). *Beyond I.Q.: A triarchic theory of human intelligence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Swanson, J. D. (Winter 2006). Breaking through assumptions about low-income, minority gifted students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 50(1), 11-25.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *"Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race*. New York: Perseus Books Group.
- Torrance, E. P., Goff, K., & Satterfield, N. B. (1998). *Multicultural mentoring of the gifted and talented*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Thompson, P. (1998). The voice of the past: Oral history. In R. Perks & A. Thomson (Eds.), *The oral history reader*. London: Routledge.
- Treffinger, D. J., & Selby, E. C. (1993). Giftedness, creativity, and learning style: Exploring the connections. In R. M. Milgram, R. Dunn & G. E. Price (Eds.), *Teaching and counseling gifted and talented adolescents: An international learning style perspective* (pp. 87-102). Westport: CT: Praeger Publications.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2008). *Facts for features: Teacher appreciation week*. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau. Retrieved June 27, 2008, from U.S. Census Bureau Website: http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/001737.html
- U.S. Department of Education. (1993). *National excellence: A case for developing America's talent*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved July 6, 2006, from U.S. Department of Education Website: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/DevTalent/part1.html>
- Villegas, A. M. (1988). School failure and cultural mismatch: Another view. *The Urban Review*, 20(4), 253-265. Retrieved October 14, 2005, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. (2006). *Ethnic group*. Retrieved August 26, 2006, from Wikipedia Website: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnicity>

- Whitmore, J. R. (1986). Understanding a lack of motivation to excel. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 30(2), 66-69.
- Wolcott, H. F. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Yow, V. R. (2005). *Recording oral history: A guide for the humanities and social sciences*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Zeichner, K. (1993). *Educating teachers for cultural diversity* (NCRTL Special Report). East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning. Retrieved November 19, 2005, from The Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC). (ERIC Accession No. ED 359167).

Appendices

Appendix A: Parental/Guardian Informed Consent Form (for youth under 18)

The Research

Your child is invited to participate in an oral history study examining the experiences of gifted African-American students who experienced full time gifted programming. The study is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirements for a doctorate in Education at the University of Denver.

For this research, I would like your child to participate in two 60 – 90 minute interviews. A third interview may be requested if needed. The interviews will be conducted at a location of your choice. Your child's participation will involve responding to a number of questions about his/her experience participating in a school or program for gifted children. Each interview will be recorded and your child will have an opportunity to review the transcripts to make corrections.

Special Considerations

Your child's involvement is completely voluntary and is in no way an obligation of any relationship we may have or have had in the past. Your child may choose to not answer any question during the interview without having to provide a reason for doing so. Your child may, at any time, designate a break, terminate the session, or withdraw from the study. If your child withdraws from the study, any information that he/she has shared will not be included in the study and will remain confidential.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to ensure that the information that your child shares with me will remain confidential. My dissertation advisor will have access to the information your child provides. Your child's name will not be used in my dissertation. He/She will be asked to select a pseudonym for use in my dissertation, and all identifying information will be deleted or changed in order to protect your child's identity.

Copies of interview tapes will not be archived, but will be retained by me until the study is completed. At that time, all tapes will be given to your child to keep or destroy at his/her discretion. If your child decides to withdraw from the study, any and all interview tapes and transcripts will be returned to your child immediately. All related computer files will be deleted.

By signing this form, you acknowledge that you understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information your child reveals concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

Risks

The interviews have been designed to minimize any emotional or psychological discomfort to your child. However, discussing past school experiences may cause your child discomfort or unpleasant memories. You and your child are asked to discuss under what conditions he/she might end the interview process and seek support from a significant adult. Situations that might cause the termination of an interview might include anxiety, reluctance to answer questions, and/or any discomfort with the interviewing content or process. If at any time, your child feels uncomfortable or anxious, he/she is encouraged to designate a break or end the interview session and seek the previously designated support.

The services of Dr. Betsy Kutrumbos will be made available for any participants who need to seek counseling due to any discomfort or anxiety stemming from these interviews. Dr. Kutrumbos is a co-founder of Educational Counseling Services, which specializes in the psychological treatment of gifted children. She also serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Denver's College of Education.

Benefits

The benefits of participating in this study is that your child will have the opportunity to contribute his/her insight into what it was like to receive gifted services as an African-American student. By hearing directly from those affected, this study will further the research on meeting the unique needs of students who are both gifted and African-American. Your child may also enjoy the opportunity to provide information about his or her own school experiences. In sharing his/her experiences, your child will be helping educators, policy makers, and researchers searching for insight into curricular and non-curricular issues, support systems, and social and emotional factors as related to African-American students who have experienced gifted programming. If you or your child would like a copy of the results of the study, I will be happy to provide one. Upon completion of the interviews, your child will receive a small monetary compensation for participation in the project. (If your child withdraws from the study, he/she will not receive this compensation.)

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at 303-309-1108. In addition, Dr. Nicholas Cutforth, my dissertation advisor, can be reached at 303-871-2477. Also, if you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Dennis Wittmer, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-2484, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs, at (303) 871-4052, or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd, Denver, CO 80208.

This study was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on 1/09/07.

You may keep these pages for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to have your child participate in this study

Thank you so much for your interest in this study.

Rivian Bass, MA

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called *Even in the Face of History: The Experiences of Gifted African-American Students*. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to have my child participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of the consent form.

Child's Name

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

Please print:

Name(s)_____

Address_____

Phone number_____

Email_____

___I grant consent for my child to be audio recorded.

___I do not grant consent for my child to be audio recorded.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B: Youth Assent Form (for youth under 18)

The Research

You are invited to participate in an oral history study examining the experiences of gifted African-American students who experienced full time gifted programming. The study is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirements for a doctorate in Education at the University of Denver.

For this research, I would like you to participate in two 60 – 90 minute interviews. A third interview may be requested if needed. The interviews will be conducted at a location of your choice. Participation will involve answering a number of questions about your experience participating in a school or program for gifted children. Each interview will be recorded and you will have an opportunity to review the transcripts to make corrections.

Special Considerations

Your involvement is completely voluntary and is in no way an obligation of any relationship we may have or have had in the past. You may choose to not answer any question during the interview without having to provide a reason for doing so. You may, at any time, designate a break, terminate the session, or withdraw from the study. If you withdraw from the study, any information that you have shared will not be included in the study and will remain confidential.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to ensure that the information that you share with me will remain confidential. My dissertation advisor will have access to the information you provide, but your name will not be used in my dissertation. You will be asked to select a pseudonym for use in my dissertation, and all identifying information will be deleted or changed in order to protect your identity.

Copies of interview tapes will not be archived, but will be retained by me until the study is completed. At that time, all tapes will be given to you to keep or destroy at your discretion. If you decide to withdraw from the study, any and all interview tapes and transcripts will be returned to you immediately. All related computer files will be deleted.

By signing this form, you acknowledge that you understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information you reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

Risks

The interviews have been designed to minimize any emotional or psychological discomfort to you. However, discussing past school experiences may cause you discomfort or unpleasant memories. You and your parent or parents are asked to discuss under what conditions you might end the interview process and seek support from a significant adult. Situations that might cause the termination of an interview might include anxiety, reluctance to answer questions, and/or any discomfort with the interviewing content or process. If at any time, you feel uncomfortable or anxious, you are encouraged to designate a break or end the interview session and seek the previously designated support.

The services of Dr. Betsy Kutrumbos will be made available for any participants who need to seek counseling due to any discomfort or anxiety stemming from the interviews. Dr. Kutrumbos is a co-founder of Educational Counseling Services, which specializes in the psychological treatment of gifted children. She also serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Denver's College of Education.

Benefits

The benefits of participating in this study is that you will have the opportunity to contribute your insight into what it was like to receive gifted services as an African-American student. By hearing directly from those affected, this study will further the research on meeting the unique needs of students who are both gifted and African-American. You may also enjoy the opportunity to provide information about your own school experiences. In sharing your experiences, you will be helping educators, policy makers, and researchers searching for insight into curricular and non-curricular issues, support systems, and social and emotional factors as related to African-American students who have experienced gifted programming. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, I will be happy to provide one. Upon completion of the interviews, you will receive a small monetary compensation for participation in the project. (If you withdraw from the study, you will not receive this compensation.)

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at 303-309-1108. In addition, Dr. Nicholas Cutforth, my dissertation advisor, can be reached at 303-871-2477. Also, if you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Dennis Wittmer, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-2484, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs, at (303) 871-4052, or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd, Denver, CO 80208.

This study was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on 1/09/07.

You may keep these pages for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to participate in this study. Thank you so much for your interest in this study.

Rivian Bass, MA

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called *Even in the Face of History: The Experiences of Gifted African-American Students*. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of the assent form.

Participant signature

date

Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form (for participants over 18)

The Research

You are invited to participate in an oral history study examining the experiences of gifted African-American students who experienced full time gifted programming. The study is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirements for a doctorate in Education at the University of Denver.

For this research, I would like you to participate in two 60 – 90 minute interviews. A third interview may be requested if needed. The interviews will be conducted at a location of your choice. Participation will involve answering a number of questions about your experience participating in a school or program for gifted children. Each interview will be recorded and you will have an opportunity to review the transcripts to make corrections.

Special Considerations

Your involvement is completely voluntary and is in no way an obligation of any relationship we may have or have had in the past. You may choose to not answer any question during the interview without having to provide a reason for doing so. You may, at any time, designate a break, terminate the session, or withdraw from the study. If you withdraw from the study, any information that you have shared will not be included in the study and will remain confidential.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to ensure that the information that you share with me will remain confidential. My dissertation advisor will have access to the information you provide, but your name will not be used in my dissertation. You will be asked to select a pseudonym for use in my dissertation, and all identifying information will be deleted or changed in order to protect your identity.

Copies of interview tapes will not be archived, but will be retained by me until the study is completed. At that time, all tapes will be given to you to keep or destroy at your discretion. If you decide to withdraw from the study, any and all interview tapes and transcripts will be returned to you immediately. All related computer files will be deleted.

By signing this form, you acknowledge that you understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information you reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

Risks

The interviews have been designed to minimize any emotional or psychological discomfort to you. However, discussing past school experiences may cause you discomfort or unpleasant memories. You are asked to consider under what conditions you might end the interview process and seek support from a significant adult. Situations that might cause the termination of an interview might include anxiety, reluctance to answer questions, and/or any discomfort with the interviewing content or process. If at any time, you feel uncomfortable or anxious, you are encouraged to designate a break or end the interview session and seek the previously designated support.

The services of Dr. Betsy Kutrumbos will be made available for any participants who need to seek counseling due to any discomfort or anxiety stemming from these interviews. Dr. Kutrumbos is a co-founder of Educational Counseling Services, which specializes in the psychological treatment of gifted children. She also serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Denver's College of Education.

Benefits

The benefits of participating in this study is that you will have the opportunity to contribute your insight into what it was like to receive gifted services as an African-American student. By hearing directly from those affected, this study will further the research on meeting the unique needs of students who are both gifted and African-American. You may also enjoy the opportunity to provide information about your own school experiences. In sharing your experiences, you will be helping educators, policy makers, and researchers searching for insight into curricular and non-curricular issues, support systems, and social and emotional factors as related to African-American students who have experienced gifted programming. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, I will be happy to provide one. Upon completion of the interviews, you will receive a small monetary compensation for participation in the project. (If you withdraw from the study, you will not receive this compensation.)

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at 303-309-1108. In addition, Dr. Nicholas Cutforth, my dissertation advisor, can be reached at 303-871-2477. Also, if you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Dennis Wittmer, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-2484, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs, at (303) 871-4052, or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd, Denver, CO 80208.

This study was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on 1/09/07.

You may keep these pages for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to participate in this study.

Thank you so much for your interest in this study.

Rivian Bass, MA

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called *Even in the Face of History: The Experiences of Gifted African-American Students*. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of the consent form.

Participant signature

date

Please print:

Name_____

Address_____

Phone number_____

Email_____

☐ I agree to be audio recorded.

☐ I do not agree be audio recorded.

Signature_____

date_____

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Overview of the project

Explain the focus of the research: the educational experiences of gifted African-American students

- the challenges that students experienced,
- the resources and/or supports that helped them face these challenges,
- the influence of racial identity on educational experiences,
- the impact of gifted programming on their lives since leaving elementary and middle school, and
- their recommendations for educators who provide gifted programming for African-American students.

Introduce oral history methods so participants know what to anticipate

- Provide personal testimony, attribute meanings to memories, reflect on experiences
- Obtain an insider's view, hear unheard voices
- Ask broad open-ended questions

Discuss informed consent

No identifying information will be collected from participants. Each participant will be asked to select a pseudonym for use in all study documents, and all identifying information will be deleted or changed in order to protect each participant's identity.

Participants will be asked to review their narrative prior to sections of it being included in my dissertation. They retain the right to ask for any information to be deleted and the right to withdraw consent at any time.

Develop plan for self-care

There is a slight risk that discussing past school experiences may cause participants discomfort or unpleasant memories. Participants are asked to develop a plan detailing under what conditions they may pause or end an interview and what significant adult they will seek support from in case of emotional distress. Participants under the age of 18 are asked to develop this plan with their parent or parents.

FIRST SESSION: Focus is on details of educational experience

Ask participants, "You spent ____ years in gifted programming. What do you remember about your experiences?"

Ask participants, "What do you remember about your teachers and your classmates?"

Ask participants, "How has being Black affected your school experience?"

In telling their stories, it is hoped that they will provide the following information:

- challenges and successes experienced
- resources and/or supports that helped them face challenges and achieve successes (parents, family, friends, teachers, counselors, community)
- significant relationships, influences
- influence of racial identity

SECOND SESSION: Focus is on perspective, meaning, and significance

Clarify any points from first interview.

Ask participants, “If you could give your elementary/middle school teachers any advice, what might that be?”

Ask participants, “Looking back from today, how do you think gifted programming has impacted you?”

Ask participants, “Was going through _____ worth it?”

Ask participants, “What would you like to add that you have not already shared?”

In telling their stories, it is hoped that they will provide the following information:

- insight into providing gifted programming for African-American students.
- the impact of participating in programming designed for gifted students
- other related issues of significance to participants

Appendix E: Emerging Codes

Social Policies & Issues

- Lack of Diversity (LD)
- Money Issues (MI)
- School Policies (SP)
- Teacher Competency (TC)
- Teacher Perceptions (TP)
- Curricular Content (CC)
- Culturally Response Teaching (CRT)
- Learning Environment (LE)
- Learning Style (LS)

Social and Emotional Adjustment

Adversity

- Acting Black (AB)
- Academic Perception (AP)
- Acting White (AW)
- Being Only Black Student (BOB)
- De-Africanization (DA)
- Got in Trouble (GT)
- Losing White Friends (LWF)
- Need to Be with Blacks (NBB)
- Non Stereotypical Behavior (NSB)
- No Voice (NV)
- Peer Pressure (PP)
- Possible Racism (PR)
- Representing Black Race (RBR)
- Race Denied by Others (RDO)
- Racial Jokes (RJ)
- Tough it Out (TIO)
- Two Worlds (TW)
- Wants Diversity (WD)

Resilience

- Anchored in Black Culture (ABC)
- Acting Differently Around Different People (ADDP)
- Adjustment to Fit in [with Blacks, with Whites] (AFB) (AFW)
- Color Blind (CB)
- Feeling Alone/ Different (FAD)

- Feeling Different from Friends (FDF)
- Impact of Friends (IF)
- Inner Strength (IS)
- Other Black Students (OBS)
- Role Model (RM)
- Transition to High School (THS)
- Self Perception (SP)

Acceptance

- Bridge Gap (BG)
- Being Me (BM)
- Coping w/ Racial Issues (C)
- Conversations about Race (CR)
- Cultural Style (CS)
- Depends on Person (DOP)
- Don't Want Classification (DWC)
- Giving Back (GB)
- Having a Voice (HV)
- Personal Goals (PG)
- Standing Out (SO)

Cross' Stages of Racial Identity

- Minimize Race (C#1)
- Acknowledge Race and Denial (C#2)
- Emergent Racial Frame of Reference (C#3)
- Strong Racial ID toward Bicultural (C#4)
- Strong Racial ID & Social Action (C#5)

Support Systems

- Family Impact (FI)
- Teacher(s) Impact (TI)
- Teacher Relationships (TR)
- Influence of Church or Spirituality (IC)
- Impact of Media (IM)

Impact of Gifted Programming

- Benefit(s) of Gifted Programming (BGP)
- Detriment(s) of Gifted Programming (DGP)